A Framework for Social Change Through Media
MACS Capstone

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores 3 models for media activism and asks the question, "Is it possible to build a new and vibrant public sphere relying heavily on new media?"

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

Emerging technology has created new possibilities for social change, particularly through media and communications technology that allow messages to be spread more rapidly and widely. The large social movements of the twentieth century – Anti-apartheid, Anti-war, Civil Rights, -- spread through the populations through media, particularly television, newspapers, and radio.

One of the reasons the Civil Rights movement caught fire nationally is because of the media's coverage of key events. Before 1955, major American media had either ignored black issues in the South altogether, or afforded them scant coverage, but when J. M. Milam and Roy Bryant were acquitted by an all-white jury of murdering 15-year-old Emmett Till, prominent African American media outlets as well as the northern white press and liberal political organizations called for national protests and boycotts. According to Myles Horton, a co-founder of the Highlander Folk School and a major player in the Civil Rights Movement, "you have to work with those people who can multiply what you do" in order to change society. Without the masses, you do not have a movement; without media you cannot reach the masses. The new technology of the time, television, was critical to the movement's success. Interviews with prominent participants and supporters built momentum and gave faces to the cause. Coverage in the nightly news of demonstrations provided audiences a front row seat to the violence. And respected television and radio commentators were able to educate the public about the details of the government's role and

showcase the public's activism. Media attention inspired many to join the movement, to sign on for the Freedom Rides, and to become politically engaged in the fight for the Civil Rights Act. Television was the right technology at the right time for this movement.

This example of how technology and media can be used to influence opinions and change minds on critical issues is an extension of Habermas's thesis on democracy and the public sphere. The public sphere, a critical concept that underlies the philosophy behind media activism, is conceived of as a place where public opinion is generated through discourse and inclusion, and views that cannot withstand scrutiny are disputed and pushed aside. The public then embraces these communally generated opinions, and the state is expected to hear and heed them.

Importantly, the public sphere "stood or fell with the principle of universal access ... A public sphere from which specific groups would be eo ipso excluded was less than merely incomplete; it was not a public sphere at all." (Habermas 1962:85) The public sphere explains how opinions are formed in a democratic society, and in its best form brings all voices of a community into discussions pertinent to the governance and sustainability of their communities. The media is essential for framing the key issues and debates affecting communities. The quest for a truly democratic media, wherein all people have equal access and equal voice in shaping what is important and relevant to communities, is the challenge that has been taken up by media activists.

Media activism refers to movements that focus their efforts though media to further their goals. Some of these look to reforming media so that it is more responsive to the people. For others it is a way to bring about social change through creative uses of various forms of media utilizing a broad range of strategies and tactics: from simply sharing stories that may not be heard in the mainstream press to blogging to online engagement that leads to on-the-ground action to tactics that subvert mainstream messaging.

In the last two decades, the Internet has revolutionized communications, combining worldwide broadcasting capability with easy-to-use and accessible tools for information dissemination, collaboration and interaction. At present 2.7 billion people – almost 40% of the world's population – are online. [1] Half of them are in the developing world, where household Internet penetration has reached 28%. In the developed world, 78% of all households are connected to the Internet. [2] This hyper-connected world gives the individual and the organization the opportunity to hear and be heard in a way that has never happened before.

Web-enabled platforms for communications have grown rapidly: Facebook only appeared in 2004 and yet has 1.2 billion users who spend on average 700 billion minutes on Facebook each month; YouTube launched in 2005 and hosts over 4 billion video views per day, with 60 hours of video uploaded every minute.[3] Twitter, which first appeared in 2006, has one billion registered users sending 500 million messages daily. There are over 200 million blogs around the

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[1] http://www.Internetworldstats.com/stats.htm
[2] http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2013-e.pdf
[3] http://www.jeffbullas.com/2012/05/23/35-mind-numbing-youtube-facts-figures-and-statistics-infographic/#KGkXe3D350W5TbB0.99

world[4], *and new social media tools for exchanging ideas, photos, videos and news are being added all the time. The Internet is seens as a key media technology for a modern functional public sphere. There is no other better way to reach the vast and varied communities affected by issues that often span not just the local or regional, but also often transnational geographies.*

Corporate interests have taken on a larger role in all types of media over time as content producers and distributors need to generate income to continue their operations and create profitability for their shareholders. Instead of being a tool to inform public debate, media has become a tool for entertainment and, because it is largely funded by advertising, caters to whatever draws the highest ratings. During the 20th century, the newspaper, radio and television industries became more and more consolidated in the hands of a few media corporations who put profitability above public responsibility. As media companies have gobbled up local media, there are fewer and fewer traditional media outlets for people to hear stories that matter to their particular communities. Stories and information about large swaths of the world's people are missing. Stories about economics and business dominate, and information is tailored to consumers with money to spend, not citizens. This form of media also tends to prop up the status quo, and so the narratives that a handful of people deem relevant or useful are the ones that global mass media spreads. Corporate media has become anything but public.

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[4] http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/newswire/2012/buzz-in-the-blogosphere-millions-more-bloggers-and-blog-readers.html

The Internet represents a new hope for a new space for participatory, public interaction. Not only has it created a new kind of communal location that may realize the promise of a robust public sphere, it may also be an antidote to the hegemony of media. The early years online were full of techno-pioneers predicting that their new public domain digital commons would be the ideal forum for a new public sphere that could shape a more egalitarian future. They hoped it would be free from the market forces that had thwarted the free exchange of ideas in other media environments. That changed in 1992 following the passage of the Scientific Advanced Technology Act that allowed commercial interests online for the first time. The early promise of a democratic, non-commercial platform was fundamentally transformed as the same forces that controlled other forms of media moved to make the Internet the domain of the powerful.

Media activists today are fighting for public access, representation, and engagement in media. Citizens are bombarded by messages all day long in our modern world and new media technologies are constantly being added to the mix. Digital natives, the young people who grew up immersed in these technologies, have lives online where the borders between entertainment, news and information consumption and social life have become blurred. For information critical to a functional public sphere and an informed citizenry to be heard above the din of this increasingly fast-paced and techno-centric world, it is critical to find ways to adapt and develop creative strategies for engagement with key audiences.

Media activism includes a variety of interconnected issues, including how to creatively use and/or reform media so that it is more responsive to the people. Activists utilize a broad range of strategies and tactics: from simply sharing stories that may not be heard in the mainstream press to identifying new modes of engagement and developing new tactics to subvert mainstream messaging. Media activism may involve radio, television, print, Internet media and/or a combination of multiple media. Today messaging rarely stays with one medium.

In our new transglobal communication landscape, what turns a collection of people into fellow members of a public is not shared citizenship, but the common set of structures and/or institutions that affect their lives. Today there is not just one public sphere, but a number of them intersecting and serving subsets of civil society. Habermas himself sees global citizenship in a wider, social context, arguing that nation-states can be important engines of citizenship but culture can also be a powerful connection. (Habermas, Citizenship and National Identity 1994) The reach of new media has brought people around the world into shared communities around common interests, from pop culture to political change to social movements.

New media activism does not stay within borders and depends on groups' abilities to define and reach those affected by their common sets of problems. Groups fighting the World Trade Organization or those concerned about the spread of GMOs are spread around the globe, but are able to share and develop information with the same ease as a local organization battling the state government over new legislation. And it is here that organizations' strategies and

tactics come in. The Internet has a great potential for community building, because of the speed of communications and the lack of gatekeepers that mass media employs.

The Internet also has another advantage: its multimedia capacity for storytelling. Story is at the center of effective change making. Facts and figures do not bring people together, but a human face with a real life story has been shown to allow people to connect to an issue. At the same time the Internet has afforded the possibilities of decentralized communication and media technologies that are accessible to individuals and communities.

Cultural sustainability is about helping communities to thrive. Media that respects and expands the diversity of thought and promotes culture is essential to the long-term sustainability of communities. This paper explores how three organizations are using media to build awareness about and tell the stories of marginalized communities. They are examples of how people are striving to influence the sphere of public opinion in order to cultivate support, protect the marginalized, and attempt to solve problems in communities around the world. These organizations map out ways of using media as a tool for cultural democracy and social change. All of them use online media as well as traditional forms of media to further their activist agendas, but they have employed different strategies and tactics to reach their goals. Their differences illuminate: the ways that information flows, how people interact differently with alternative forms of media, and what works and what doesn't.

The three organizations included in this analysis are Idle No More, Invisible Children and The Tiziano Project. Idle No More uses the Internet as a meeting place to share information, alert various publics to events, and build a community of Indigenous people in Canada and internationally. It is an example of classic grassroots activism. It has no central leadership and the broad goal to build support for the rights of Canada's Indigenous people. They use social media to build community and share actions and news pertinent to that community.

Invisible Children has one goal, to end the use of child soldiers by warlord Joseph Kony and his Lords Republican Army (LRA) in Uganda. They believe by building awareness of the issue and focusing the world's attention on the atrocities perpetrated by Kony and the LRA they can end a terrible chapter in Uganda's history. Invisible Children is a traditional non-profit with centralized leadership, a hierarchical structure, and a singular focus. They use social media to build support and spread awareness and promote action.

The Tiziano Project is dedicated to teaching citizen journalism to young, media savvy people in conflict zones and underreported regions. By equipping their students with media skills and a platform for sharing their stories, The Tiziano Project believes that that they can begin to document their cultures, change the way the world sees these communities, and their lives will improve. Some of that improvement is because those who complete the program will have a marketable skill, but organization's philosophy rests on the idea that a new journalism model must incorporate storytelling collaboration with people who live

in places that are being reported on, and by including local voices people in conflict zones may be better understood by the world at large.

All three organizations are using media, and in particular technologies that enable collaboration and engagement with the media, in an attempt to improve the human condition. All believe that by informing the public through telling stories, change will happen, but their ways of utilizing media are very different as are the ways they measure their success.

Through these three organizations, I will investigate the efficacy of different strategies and tactics for using media to promote cultural sustainability. In my analysis of these strategies and tactics, I will be able to begin to address what needs to happen for a more inclusive media world to flourish, ways to break down the walls that are Balkanizing media, and some best practices for other activists who want to use media to create a more democratic public sphere both on and offline.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This paper considers three interdependent threads that are essential for media activism to be a force for social change: a functional public sphere, an understanding of digital media, and an examination of activist strategies/tactics. Media scholars are debating and working to define the roles of the Internet and social media in social movements. They are divided about whether new media simply mirrors old media in the ways it excludes some and exaggerates others. The ability of citizens to use new media to participate in meaningful and effective ways is still uncertain.   Using examples like the Arab Spring and Idle No More, scholars are investigating the strengths and weaknesses of new media in organizing. As the tools are rapidly changing, the ways that people are using them evolving, and the challenges communities are facing are increasingly complex, this is an important area of inquiry that can help equip the next generation of activists.

The Pubic Sphere

Jürgen Habermas's concept of "the public sphere," an ideal place guaranteed to all citizens in which public opinion can be formed is a foundational concept in media activism. (Habermas, The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964) 1974) According to Habermas, the public sphere must be separate from the political arena. Issues that affect the people should be discussed by the people, and their consensus should be heard and acted upon by those in power. The originally conceived public sphere assumed government was the main mechanism for change, but globalization has changed the power structures.

While many problems may still be within a state's purview, corporations and other international institutions may now have more power to affect the status quo than any government.

Habermas sees media as a critical part of this public sphere. Rational consensus can only come about where a reasoning and informed public exists, and people look to media to supply the necessary information to enable them to debate complex issues and come to a consensus. As new media have emerged, their role in the public sphere resonates with many contemporary media scholars. Habermas' original thesis from the 1960s, that the media had moved away from its mission and had moved from a "journalism of conviction to journalism of commerce" is as relevant today as it was fifty years ago.

A key concern among contemporary media scholars is that we now lack a responsive and accountable media landscape. Ad revenue has become more important in programming decisions than the public good, and stories are crafted to resonate with the people most likely to spend money, leaving out issues relevant to the poor or working-class communities. In 1983, 50 companies owned 90% of the media Americans consumed. In 2011, the same 90% was in the hands of just 6 companies.[5] This massive media consolidation has allowed a handful of corporations to control the content of news and information, severely limiting the amount of local news and programming that citizens receive, and constraining the local voices heard through media in the local public sphere. Since the media system is a social institution that transmits culture, this means

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[5] *http://owni.eu/2011/11/25/infographic-media-consolidation-the-illusion-of-choice/*

that corporate media is complicit in producing a populace that values economy over culture and community. (McChesney, Theses on media deregulation 2003)

Media critic Noam Chomsky goes even further, calling our current media system "propaganda" designed to subvert democracy by consciously constructing public opinion, in collusion with the other powerful institutions - governments, corporations, and universities - crafting messages to maintain the status quo, with the majority of the people unconsciously muzzled. (Chomsky 1997). The corporate media create the accepted narrative against which all other media react.

In the pre-digital media landscape, diversity of expression was limited by gatekeepers with agendas, the high costs of producing content, and even limited air and page space. The Internet was viewed as a democratizing media, an entirely public domain. (Lovink, Designing the Digitial Commons 2002) Because the barriers to citizen participation are lower, the Internet was seen as a frontier with untapped potential for the kinds of dialogues unheard in the old media model, where marginalized communities could come together and organize. (Trend 1997)

There little consensus though about whether the online world is living up to the early promise of being a democratizing public sphere. Much of the criticism centers on the global media companies who are using new platforms to gather our information and push their consumerist agendas and the concept of globalism's inherent goodness. (Lovink, A Ramble through Theories of Globalization 2002) In addition, the digital divide creates barriers to entry that

make access difficult for many people. One third of the US population does not have access to high speed Internet, mostly rural and poor, keeping them and the issues that matter to them out of the discussion. *Internet speeds strongly affect how people use the Internet. Studies point to dial-up users engaging in less than half the online activities as those with broadband.[6] In addition, as more and more information is delivered in videos, download speeds limit the kinds of information users may receive. On top of the digital divide, the hegemony of western languages is an obstacle to the Internet becoming a functional transnational public sphere for issues that cross borders. (Barnett 2003) (Berners-Lee and Halpin 2012) If the people cannot speak with one another, it is easy to further divide them. (Moyers 2013) It means that millions are cut off from accessing the stream of news and information that could help create a vibrant transnational public sphere of the 21st century.*

Government policy, particularly the 1996 Telecommunications Act, which bolstered the idea of telecommunications as a commodity open to market forces, resulted in stripping away the last vestiges of broadcast media's accountability to the public. During the 1980s, the FCC came to see the public interest standard as an impediment to the marketplace. At the same time, the courts also began to move away from viewing media's role as a public forum. They decided "to limit public forum status to traditional arenas such as streets and parks", giving business the right to limit viewpoints in media. (Barnett 2003, p 134) (McChesney and Miller, A stealth Attack on Freedom of the Press 2002) With all

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[6] *http://pewinternet.org/Commentary/2012/May/Pew-Internet-Broadband.aspx*

sorts of new media industries arising, the FCC decided that competition would serve the public best and that previous federally mandated obligations were too vague to be enforced and could be a threat to broadcasters' First Amendment rights. These policy shifts also led to massive deregulation, and the loss of many rules that had advanced program diversity, localism, and compliance with public interest standards. The 1996 Telecommunications Act rewrote the rules for broadcast licensing and made media consolidation easier by lifting limits of the number of stations one company could own and writing licensing rules that favored large corporate broadcasters. (Benton Foundation n.d.)

The Internet is becoming as much of a corporate mouthpiece as other mass media. It is not necessarily more democratic or a better public sphere because the same actors from mainstream media have the biggest presence. Instead of adding voices, they rely on the same set of "powerful actors" for their information, mainly governments and corporations. There is the same government complicity with the media corporations allowing an inordinate amount of power to flow to organizations instead of individuals. Cultural hegemony is reaffirmed by the small number of multinationals controlling international communications. (Fotopuoulos 1999)

In order to counter the power of corporate media and create a more representative public sphere, the media reform movement is actively working to put control back in the hands of the people. This movement views a responsive media as a civil right and calls for a public awakening to the government's complicity in media policy that favors corporations above the people. Since a

handful of corporations control the very media where people should find criticism of media policy, they have been able to control media policy, keeping their anti-public interest activities out of view.   For this reason, Robert McChesney says, "social movements must be at the forefront of the struggle, not a bullet-point for after the revolution." (McChesney, Global Media, Neoliberalism, and Imperialism 2001)

Media literacy is another tool for elevating the debate in the public sphere, facilitating more critical thinking by citizens, promoting cultural democracy, engaging citizens, and a way to subvert corporate media's messaging by making the manipulations more transparent. (Hobbs 1998) (Lewis and Jhally 1998) Insofar as the Internet is a cultural form where information is presented with a kind of equality, citizens need to be taught to differentiate and contextualize the information they consume. (Buckingham 2006) But it is not in the interest of mass media to have a public that sees through the manipulations, since embedded in their messaging is the consumerism that brings them their advertising dollars. There are media literacy courses in many schools around the world, but instead of teaching anything about critical thinking, most are teaching technical video skills assuming that the critical skills will come along with learning it, but there is no evidence that that happens. (Lewis and Jhally 1998)

Even for those that break out of the dominant narratives there are challenges. One of the by-products of the structure of the Internet is that, designed to create spaces for niche affinity groups to interact, it can further fracture communities and reaffirm myopic worldviews as people self-select their

discussion groups and sites to support their version of truth, which many refer to

as self-siloing. Rather than creating a public sphere of the exchange, evaluation,

and shared consensus on issues relevant to the public, new media can isolate

communities even more. (Krotoski 2011) (Smiers 2012) While the Internet affords

greater potential for the free exchange of ideas, this segregation from divergent

opinions may act to strengthen polarity by confirmation bias.

Alternative media institutions are another piece of the puzzle of creating a

representative public sphere. Bloggers, citizen journalists and a variety of non-

corporate media practitioners are now able to spread ideas that counter the

mainstream narrative. They are able to use many of the same tools that mass

media have traditionally used to attract audiences to their programs and

publications, using sensational stories, celebrity sound bites, fragmentation of

information, and personalized content. More importantly, they are telling stories

that mainstream media does not want to tell. Previously marginalized

communities are able to set the narratives to their own stories rather than

allowing mass media to do it for them. They are also frequently able to affect the

agenda of corporate media by publicizing issues so well that they enter the public

sphere and have to be covered by the mainstream.

When Habermas wrote his seminal paper, he viewed the public sphere as

being limited by national borders, and governments as the entities that would

respond to the people's will. That is no longer a model that works as issues and

movements are more and more frequently transnational and the power to remedy

situations is in the hands of international corporations rather than local

governments. This creates new challenges to the creation of a vibrant public sphere as corporations do not typically feel any responsibility to anyone except their stockholders, and governments' only leverage over them is through regulation.

The power of media for activism creates new possibilities in this increasingly globalized public sphere. Social change and media are interdependent, and together create the potential for people to learn about social change in other places, new models for its use, and to have a voice in the communities they live in. (Chan 2012)

New/Social Media

The world of new media is very young, and the literature about it is evolving. Recent collective actions like the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street have forced media activism scholars to see the potentials and pitfalls of our new technologies in a new light. Some of the research concerns dissecting and defining how movements might use it differently from traditional media, though there is another school of thought that believes all it does is speed up the way movements have always operated.

McLuhan believed that the very nature of media shapes society more than the content, that we receive and perceive information differently in a book from a television program. With each new technology there is a new form of cognition, new boundaries, and new ways of thinking about the world. And he was prescient in his view of the "electric" media as creating a "global village", in which he saw the possibility of bringing people who were divided together, both in

distance and in cultural terms, making unseen communities that were easy to ignore visible.

Opportunities

Social and new media lend themselves easily to activism. New media such as blogs, YouTube, podcasts have opened the door for individuals and organizations to express wider ranging opinions and given them the ability to reach enormous audiences. Social media like Facebook and Twitter have allowed people to interact with friends and strangers, sharing ideas and discussions within virtual communities and networks.

An understanding of the role of social media in shaping counter-movements is important to understanding how future protesters may learn from them. The strength comes not only from its ease for organizing, but in its ability to share information with others who could be in similar situations. During the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, one finding shows that Twitter was able to "re-create journalism as a conversation rather than an expert telling a story," and that the "news" coming out was a co-creation of bloggers, activists and traditional journalism. (Skinner 2011)

The Arab Spring demonstrations and protests have been used as a case study both to prove as well as disprove the power of social media. Different forms of communication were used to different ends in each country that are collectively identified under the moniker "Arab Spring". (Anderson 2011) The Egyptians were led by urban youth making social media a more common medium, but in other countries word of mouth as well as television and radio

played more significant role. In Tunisia, less than 20 percent of the population uses social media, but almost everyone has access to a mobile phone so texting was very important to the organizing. Those who point to a certain Facebook page as proof that social media and grassroots organizing were responsible for the Arab Spring are probably unaware that it was created by Google's marketing executive for the Middle East. (Bar'el 2012) Where the Internet and new media were most effective, however, was in forcing mainstream media to pay attention to stories that were well known online and could no longer be ignored.

The speed of the world's adoption of new technologies also suggests there is great potential for transnational online activism that could change the power relationships of corporations, trade and development regimes. (Bennett 2003) The new communications practices may merely reduce the cost or increase efficiencies of political actions, or they may change the game itself. The digital world could actually be working in favor of resource poor players who can now experiment with strategies outside of traditional media channels, because the shift from media consumer to producer is a part of this democratization of media.

But it is not all positive in terms of movement building, since the ease of leaving a cause is as easy as joining, organizations are more vulnerable to new constituencies making community building an eternal chore. This impermanent quality of online networks also enables a new organizational model, different from traditional movement organizations where people follow leaders with stricter ideologies and adhere to membership requirements. Many modern movements

are characterized by having many online hubs and are less defined by leaders and more by affinities. A large number of these new organizations are aimed at holding transnational targets accountable to activists and their constituencies. More often these new organizations are looking beyond single governments at international issues of food, water, labor, the environment and trade. And they are not single-issue organizations like the traditional NGO. People may stay with this group for more campaigns or come and go as the organizations move to new targets or issues.

One of the challenges that online activism faces is "slacktivism," the idea that by signing a petition or liking a Facebook page, people may unjustifiably see themselves as part of something big. The criticism of this form of activism is that it is toothless, that it may bring small change but never challenges the status quo. For critics of these kinds of engagement, the argument is that personal contact with other protestors is a prerequisite for the strong connections necessary for grassroots activism. This camp also believes that there must be a clear leader for a successful social change movement. (Gladwell 2010) It is possible that these new tools are not leading to the kinds of discussion we need for social change, and that social media like Twitter is even detrimental, because big ideas cannot be distilled into 140 characters, and pettiness and snark are given more weight than information. (M. K. Lewis 2013) Research has shown that Twitter users are anything but a representative cross-section of the public, and discussions tend to skew towards the negative. (Amy Mitchell 2013) This negative view of the

Internet casts users as an "online lynch mob," with their ability to comment anonymously leading to mob rule and tribalism. (Rosenbaum n.d.)

There are instances where new media has been used to mobilize people with great success. The 2001 Filipino ousting of President Estrada was the first time social media helped force out a national leader, using text messaging as an organizing tool to bring more than a million people into the streets. But technology alone does not guarantee success, and new media alone cannot change opinion. Media facilitates change through a two-step process: an opinion is expressed by media; it is then repeated by friends, family, colleagues, and other trusted people. (Shirky 2001) This has always been true, but the Internet and new media speed the process.

The pressure of public opinion via social media has been mobilized to change corporate culture as well as politics. Social media makes it easy to shame a corporation in the media until shareholders or corporate officers realize that the bad publicity is a bigger threat to their carefully cultivated brand image than taking action to change. These kinds of campaigns against Starbucks and Nike have been extremely effective. The reach of the Internet means that many issue campaigns don't require offline action at all.

The Internet is not a separate information universe from traditional media. Viral videos, images, and online stories that get big enough can no longer be ignored by mass media. These new spaces of the Internet have great value as "counter-publics." Bloggers and website message boards allow for a kind of expression, where typically marginalized or unpopular views can counter the

mainstream. (Boler 2010) The gatekeeper role of traditional media has been forced to change since stories travel so seamlessly around the web and back and forth to other media.

New media has great potential for social activism because of its breadth, its quality of reach, and its capacity to change awareness. Receiving information from someone in our network that we know makes it more valid than if we got it through an anonymous source. And information can be given urgency if it is up to the minute reporting, making us feel closer to the action, and putting us in the game. The ties made by social media have become important connections, and there is enormous potential for online connections becoming offline movements. (Rutledge 2010)

Barriers and Obstacles

The Internet would seem to be a better technology for discussion. But the conundrum is why, in an age when there is more and more access to the tools that the Internet and new media promise, there is less and less civic engagement in this "civic commons in cyberspace". One reason may be that media traditionally has been great at consciousness-raising, but is less useful for the more important stages of information engagement and solution seeking. Internet and new media studies are still at an early stage, but it appears that deliberative participation has not been on the rise, though access should be a predictor of participation. The problem is that many people use new media to reinforce decisions already made and to arm themselves with information to use in discussions with others. The reasons people connect to and revisit sites are

more dependent on the framing of the story than on its design, and multiple

points of entry allow users to pick and choose what to read, and in which order.

(Coleman, et al. 2008)

In terms of social change this kind of independence of thought can be very

problematic and all the great content in the world will do nothing to change things

if it does not attract the audience that needs to hear about it. To influence the

public sphere, people need to talk to a group of others who are engaged and

active. To change corporations, they may need to reach a combination of

citizens, corporate decision makers and government representatives. A large

number of new organizations are aimed at holding transnational targets

accountable to activists and their constituencies. These movements need to both

motivate the people affected and pressure the governments who can regulate

these transnational corporations.

The Internet is not necessarily contributing to free speech and creative

expression either. Video sharing sites do offer the opportunity for new voices to

be heard by large audiences, but the technology makes it easy for people to

organize their lives so that they are not exposed to discordant ideas and views

that could help them understand or respect the views of others. (J. A. Hart 2008)

Many great organizations pushing great causes cannot get beyond the

supporters who already know about and support their positions. The Internet

makes this self-siloing even easier, allowing people to only speak to and hear

from people they already agree with.   Speaking only to people who think like you

creates movement cohesion by buttressing the beliefs you already have, but also

limits new ideas and alternate viewpoints, and may lead to misinformation

becoming belief through confirmation bias.

So this self-siloing can be both good and bad for media activism. You

may have a very large audience, but a very narrow or rigid view, and the aim for

many organizations is to change hearts and minds.

In addition, one study showed that Internet communications do not differ

significantly from offline debate in print. Starting from the Habermas concept of

participatory culture, the study looked at what it takes for people and

communities to enter the public sphere. The Internet should make entry to media

easier, losing the gatekeeper of traditional media, but it turns out the Internet

mirrors the structure of the offline public sphere, with a concentration of

communication by a few actors on the Internet that exceeds print media, and in

the US it is even more one-sided than many other places. (Gerhards and Shafer

2010)

Strategies and Tactics

Alternative media may be able to counter corporate media's agenda,

because it includes more diverse voices. The dynamics of media production and

consumption have changed entirely as audiences have become producers, and

the opportunities for interactivity and discussion create a much more participatory

landscape than ever before. (Jenkins, The Cultural Logic of Media Convergence

2004)

One way to maximize the power of alternative media is to allow issues to

be framed by big media, because they have the reach, and then let grassroots

media reframe them to reach their constituencies. While this might seem to encourage more siloing, it can in fact allow more ideas to become discussed in the public sphere by more people in more places.

"Citizen journalism" is seen as one way that activism can "take back the media". This form of journalism, by the people, has evolved quickly in the last decade as the means have become more accessible and affordable. But it should be approached with caution since there is a potential problem with untrained and unethical information sitting on an equal footing with professionally researched stories.

Tactical media is another genre of activist media that has gained traction with new technologies. It may be characterized as expressions of dissent that rely on artistic practices and DIY media created from relatively cheap technology and means of communication (radio, video, Internet). (Boler 2010) These expressions tend to be one-offs and frequently communal, like Flashmobs or smart mobs, and other actions designed to garner attention. There is a great deal of potential in these kinds of collaborations between artists and activists in this field, because of artists' adaptability to new and different technologies and cultural situations. (Lovink, Tactical Media, the Second Decade 2005)

The very concept of "community" has also evolved with new media to now include cyber-groups spread over large areas. Many of these communities are self-defined and self-constructed, and members derive an identity from being a part of them. (Carpentier, Lie and Servaes 2003) Community media has become a means of expression of community, rather than for it, with the people as active

participants. Marginalized groups can also strengthen their identity through community media by being seen as a cohesive group by outsiders. The importance of community media is its role as catalyst in bringing a variety of voices into the same sphere, where they may find common ground and common strategies. They can offer the chance for real participation to groups that would never be represented in the mainstream. In many ways community media can be less rigidly tied to norms and can be more innovative. Community media can also be seen as a crucial element of civil society by offering a diverse group of constituencies an entry into public debate. This form of media has great potential to counter mainstream media, while strengthening its place at the crossroads of social organizations and movements.

Ethnic media is one form of community media that has grown exponentially in the last few decades. Minority and marginal audiences have been turning away from traditional media because of the mainstream's portrayal of them and lack of interest in their stories. Ethnic media is also a challenge to the status quo where people are able to produce media "from within their own cultural context." It may also be seen as a cultural institution, like education, offering Indigenous peoples a venue for cultural leadership and resistance to mainstream media. (Meadows 1995) A more engaged and participatory culture is coming out of this new media, as more voices are expressed giving people a place to exercise their agency, expanding the public sphere, and turning media from a top-down into a bottom up storytelling model. The downside is that it may also be seen as part of an international trend in media towards fragmented

audiences, and that division into niche ethnic media channels disrupts the social fabric, and inhibits a healthy public sphere. (Deuze 2006)

Traditional media works in tandem with new media in important ways. The Occupy Wall Street movement used a mix of new and old media to multiply their message and brought people from diverse backgrounds together physically. Their physical occupation of Wall Street guaranteed mainstream press, which was buttressed by social media, and activists on-site blogging, publishing press releases and actively updating websites.

One problem for many activists is their tendency to equate their campaign's success with media success and channel their energies accordingly, but when their efforts don't generate enough mainstream news coverage, they feel they have failed. Often their all-consuming mass media work and relentless public relations approach undermines their ability to communicate with ordinary people, damaging the groups themselves. In addition, the need to focus on talking points undercuts organizing by distilling complex matters down to "media-friendly gruel," as well as damaging the art of conversation with affected communities. This need for mass media acceptance may also impair the educational component that is necessary to create an informed public. (Sobieraj 2011) This is where new and alternative media may be best suited for activism. Online media are very effective at reaching targeted audiences and delivering links and compelling stories that create a well-informed community. The interactive and social components are incredible assets, and the ability to create

unique content and frame an issue makes it more valuable to an organization than a mainstream mention.

A move away from mass media also creates new ways to build movements. One model of media activism that has has met with success is that of the World Social Forum (WSF), a gathering of thousands of activists representing groups and movements from around the world. It was designed as a setting for the free exchange of ideas on a global scale, but they struggled for many years with getting mainstream media attention. They had more success when they adopted a better model to build the global public sphere they hope for. The South American communities' comunicação compartilhada, or shared communication model was adapted for use at the first WSF conference in 2001. They created an online platform where media activists from different parts of the world could engage in participatory dialogue. Over the years it has evolved to include video and radio and has provided equipment for media activists. This approach is seen as a good alternative to the more common uses of media in a PR fashion, because it expands the movement by mobilizing groups to communicate with each other. What is interesting about this movement is that they are not looking for mass media interest. They are looking at a media that is used within their groups to change the world by shifting its consciousness. (Stephansen 2012)

The most important element for successful media activism is great storytelling. The biggest challenge is to find the assumptions that underlie the status quo, and to develop the narratives that can replace them. Corporate media

has the power of reach and market research to create and propagate their myths. Smaller movements may have neither the money nor the reach, but the Internet and new media have begun to democratize the transmission of the meme. A great storyteller brings creative strategies to expand the audience for these untold narratives. Activists and organizers can brand and use the tools that the powerful have always used: creating a story, repeating it until it is believed as truth, and finding power memes that remind people of this truth again and again. (Canning and Reinsborough 2010)

Conclusion

There are many differences of opinion about whether and how new media differ from older media. As we have more examples of how organizations have used new media we will start to be able to assess the efficacy of new media for promoting change and a functional public sphere. It will help us assess if the Internet and new media will be a significant new force for social change; if it will change the way that people and movements operate; and if better results are possible with different tools and tactics.

As new media technologies evolve and become more ubiquitous, the ways that they will be used for social change will expand. New alternative media platforms, more innovative collaborations between artists and activists, evolving concepts of community and new metrics for evaluating success will continue to push media activism.

Chapter Three: Case Studies Analysis

The following three case studies demonstrate media's potential for social change, in particular its ability to create and contribute to a functional public sphere.   In order for change to happen in the public sphere, a representative cross-section of people must be willing and able to communicate freely with each other and come to a communal consensus about issues that affect them. These three organizations all employ new media to further their activism. Idle No More's Facebook page acts as a central hub for information and community building. The Tiziano Project is training citizen journalists who will add local context to the new transnational public sphere. And Invisible Children has used social media to stir young online audiences into action.

Idle No More

The Idle No More movement came into being in October of 2012 in reaction to a bill before the Canadian legislature known as C-45. The proposed law threatened vast tracts of wilderness and many previously protected waterways. In response to the bill's impending passage, four Indian rights activists (Jessica Gordon, Sheelah McLean, Sylvia McAdams, and Nina Wilsonfeld) in Saskatchewan decided to hold a rally to inform their community about the effects of C-45. The women created a Facebook page to organize the rally and named it "Idle No More", thinking it was a good motivational slogan.

The concept struck a cord and following their successful initial meeting, gatherings took place in other provinces across the country. Using only Facebook, Twitter and email lists, Idle No More was able to bring together thousands of people across the country. Within a month they were able to organize a National Day of Action. They have also attracted media attention and the imagination of the world by using alternative media and creative public protests like smart mobs. Traditional round dances and drum circles became a common sight in shopping malls in Canada and the United States towards the end of 2012 as people advocated and educated the public about indigenous rights and environmental justice.

Not only did Canada's Indigenous People join the movement and the discussion, but non-Indigenous groups including many environmental groups became involved with the organization and its cause, since it fit their agendas as well. Beyond Canada's borders many other Indigenous groups and supporters have joined the movement. Though they did not stop the passage of C-45, the movement continued to evolve beyond fighting just one issue and became a multi-coalition force for Aboriginal rights and environmental justice worldwide.

The Internet helped build these coalitions across issues and national borders faster than traditional media. Not only does the Internet reach other countries and across cultural barriers more easily, it is constantly updated and encourages an interactive role for the audience. Finding a Facebook page and signing on means that everyone sees what is happening, even when mass media doesn't cover it, and builds a sense of connection around the issue.

In the classic sense of the public sphere, the Idle No More Facebook group is a place to inform the public, discuss issues that affected them and exert pressure on the state to do the people's will. Their intended audience began as a limited set of people, the Indigenous peoples of Canada, who make up around 3 percent of the country's population. (630 bands, 1.1Million people, 30+ languages) The intention was to create a place for dialogue about issues that affected them. But because the same issues concerned many people beyond the intended group, the Idle No More sphere evolved to include people around the world with a common set of goals and variety of agendas.

Invisible Children

The second organization is Invisible Children. Founded in in 2004 by fresh USC film school graduates Bobby Bailey, Laren Poole and Jason Russell, their initial plan was to go to Darfur and document the conflict there, but when there was trouble getting into the country, they found themselves in Uganda with an equally compelling subject, the civil war there. They discovered that the warlord Joseph Kony and his rebel group called the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) were terrorizing the people, particularly the children who were frequently kidnapped and conscripted

into his army, where the boys would become soldiers and the girls sex slaves.

Fear of the LRA led to a phenomenon called the "night commute", where rural

children were sent to sleep in the cities because the risk of abduction was lower.

Invisible Children's first campaign, called the Global Night Commute, was based

around a documentary they made once they returned to the US, Invisible

Children: Rough Cut. They were able to use the film and several others as

fundraising, awareness and organizing tools for many years, as the organization

advocated for the people of Uganda to government bodies around the world and

sponsored humanitarian programs in northern Uganda.

And then on March 5th of 2012, they posted a half-hour, high production

value video on YouTube called Kony 2012. Within days it became the fastest

growing viral video ever. To date it has been viewed more than 100 million times

on YouTube alone, with estimates of a third more on other sites. The campaign

netted the organization more than $20 million, and 3.7 million people pledged

their support for efforts to arrest Joseph Kony. The Kony 2012 campaign was

named the Digital Campaign of the Year at the 2013 SXSW.

The Tiziano Project

The third organization is The Tiziano Project. Founded by Jonathan Vidar and Andrew McGregor who met in 2007 in a photojournalism class at USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism, they

believe that with the advent of cheaper technology and the great reach of the

Internet, people around the world should be able to tell their own stories and

become citizen journalists. They focus on communities in conflict, post-conflict

and underreported areas, places where mainstream news cannot or will not

report, teaching people the media skills to tell their stories from their own

perspectives, and giving them a platform to share those stories with mainstream

news outlets. McGregor has said that he started The Tiziano Project because he

thought it was immoral to have undocumented mass murder occur in the world at

the same time technological advances have produced Web sites such as

YouTube that are easy for anybody with a video camera and Internet access to

use.

They believe that by arming people in underreported regions with

professional quality media skills, a platform for sharing their stories and

affiliations to get them heard, people can change the way the world sees them,

their culture and their conflict, and their lives will improve. The Project is aware

that every storyteller in each locality will be telling a different story and tackling

different challenges, but a common set of skills will empower them all. The

organization does not give their students story directions, but lets them decide

the course of their investigations.

The Tiziano Project stresses quality journalism, bringing experienced

professionals into the field to teach and emerging technology experts, as well.

The program is structured around a two-month curriculum, which teaches

everything from journalism fundamentals and ethics to writing and storytelling

through words. They also stress great visual components in storytelling, allowing students to bring narratives to life through photographs with audio, as well as digital video.

Their mission is to be an antidote to "parachute journalism" that takes a limited outsider's perspective to all news, and frequently misses the cultural underpinning to a situation that might bring more clarity to the news. Their StoriesFrom website aggregates their many citizen journalists' videos from around the world. The Tiziano Project is still very new and is expanding. They began in Kigali, Rwanda teaching locals to produce content for Western news agencies and have since then launched projects in Iraq, Afghanistan, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Kurdistan, Latvia, Kosovo, DR Congo, Kenya, and Somalia, as well as Los Angeles, Philadelphia and the San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation, and they continue to expand the ranks of citizen journalists around the world. And even though they have not been at it very long, they have won numerous awards for the program, including beating out NPR and CNN for the Community Collaboration award at the 2011 Online Journalism Awards, for their work promoting collaborative journalism in Iraq.

All three of these organizations are using media to improve the human condition. They believe that by informing the public and telling stories, change will happen, but their ways of utilizing media are very different. These case studies represent different models and each one has something to tell us about what works, what doesn't work, and different ways to expand the public sphere.

Transnational Community Building

All three organizations employ different media strategies to persuade and educate the public. They are all attempting to change perception. In order to do that they need to create a community united behind a cause, capable of affecting others. The public sphere as originally described by Habermas lived within national boundaries and was involved with national politics and governance. The new public sphere often crosses national boundaries because in an increasingly globalized world, issues cross borders and it is not simply any one national government that has the power to change a situation. So the question becomes how best to create a (trans)national public sphere that works in the modern world. If the public sphere concept is tied to the public's input into things that affect them and their economic well being, with the power to hold decision makers accountable, then the public sphere of the 21st century must be both national and transnational.

Idle No More is the perfect example of using new social media to enhance the public sphere, as it is a place where the people can speak and share ideas separate from but intended to affect the political sphere. Using Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and a variety of blogs to share information and spark discussions, the organization has grown from a group of local Indigenous people fighting a legislative bill to a movement uniting people around the world in an internationalized public sphere to discuss the environment, justice and human rights.

The Idle No More movement has expanded in a very similar way to the Occupy Wall Street movement. Both movements are working to change government policy and public perception to make corporations more accountable to the people. The first step was to build a vocal community of like-minded activists willing to be politically engaged. This creates a context where the movement can be successful without a specific leader; it gathers strength and momentum precisely because the core mission has been adopted and repeated by supporters around the world. In the case of Idle No More, people who see it as a movement for the earth, against corporate exploitation of people and resources, and as an assertion of Indigenous rights. Individuals may be compelled more by one of these issues than the others, but it creates the space for anyone who sees the importance of any of those issues to band together.

Idle No More has also expanded the public sphere by harnessing the power of new media and new technologies to bring people all over the country together for online town hall meetings and teach-ins, which are informational and are including populations that would otherwise be unable to participate in these essential civil society events. Since their reason for being is to change government policy that affects them, creating a community of informed citizens is key to fighting the power.

The growth of Idle No More beyond their own borders may also indicate the existence of a functional transnational public sphere.   Because the movement is concerned with international environmental and human rights issues, the target they are after is more than simply one government.   They are

no longer focused on just legislative bills, but how transnational corporate power affects local communities. This brings it into the company of other 21st century movements like Occupy Wall Street and other anti-globalization groups. These groups united by a common enemy feed each other, despite not sharing a common strategy. In fact, it may be helpful that they are attacking issues they hold in common from multiple directions with a variety of tactics. It also requires solutions that are more balanced; with watchdogs monitoring both social and environmental harm and impacts, an organization has more pressure to respond with policies that don't short-change one set of issues in the service of another.

Invisible Children's Kony 2012 Campaign was about also consciousness-raising in the international pubic sphere, and focused mainly on information that would cause people to give money and join an online community for an event. But unlike the Idle No More model, the idea that the public would join a discussion or find common cause with other groups was not part of their plan, because their movement was a call to action about a single issue.

Invisible Children began building their community using offline media with their first documentaries, years before the Kony film, screening them for community groups to build a base, which was later critical in the Kony 2012 video strategy. Co-founder and evangelical Christian Jason Russell had done missionary work in Africa before he went to film school, and he came to believe his mission was to do Christ's work by ending genocide through filmmaking. Invisible Children began building a strong following among members of a group known as The Emerging Church, a Generation-Y congregation with no formal

organization, no single leader, and no uniform code of belief. It's a growing

movement of disillusioned youth looking for a more accessible brand of

Christianity. Their young congregants are known for using the Internet to build

social connections with an emphasis on social activism. (Kron 2012) This

Christian underpinning was later removed from Invisible Children's site when the

Kony video exposed them to a much wider and more varied audience, but the

connections and community remained. One of the characteristics of this

movement is a large millennial population, the very same group that was later

responsible for making the Kony 2012 video go viral.

Beginning in 2006, with their first video, they began a series of highly

experiential community building events. Through social media they were able to

mobilize around 80,000[7] young people, across over 100 American cities, for their

"Global Night Commute" campaign, which was designed to put the participants in

the shoes of the children of Uganda who were leaving their villages every night

for fear they'd be kidnapped by the LRA. In 2007, they mobilized 68,000 in 15

American cities for their "Displace Me" campaign, where participants experienced

what Ugandans in Internally Displaced Person Camps lived through. In 2009,

they held rallies called "The Rescue" in 10 worldwide cities, attracting 85,000

people who "abducted" themselves to a public place where they would spend the

night and wait to be rescued by a handful of celebrities, including Oprah Winfrey,

Kristen Bell, Sen. James Inhofe and Rep. John Lewis. And in 2011, a campaign

called "25 and Break the Silence" brought together 90,000 participants at 18

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[7] *Invisible Children's statistics*
http://invisiblechildren.com/program/international-events/

events across the U.S., where people pledged to be silent for 25 hours to spread

awareness of the 25 years that the Ugandan conflict has gone on. These shared

experiences built solidarity among their young followers and kept them coming

back and engaged.

At the same time, Invisible Children held three different lobbying events in

Washington, bussing in more than 3,000 of these young Americans to meet with

congressional representatives considering anti-LRA legislation. In May of 2010,

President Obama signed the Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern

Uganda Recovery Act. Without the Invisible Children's participation it is

questionable whether this legislation would have gotten onto the foreign policy

agenda of the legislators. Their very calculated media strategy clearly affected

government policy by publicizing an issue no one was talking about before, and

later The Kony 2012 campaign helped in getting a resolution of condemnation of

Joseph Kony through the Senate. One of the Senators that had put the

resolution forward noted that he was quizzed by his daughter about what he was

doing about Kony.

The Tiziano Project allows people formerly left out of or marginalized from

the public sphere a way to enter with a unique voice. Media skills and new

technologies give them the ability to not only speak to but to reach a wider public.

In many of the regions where the Tiziano Project provides media training, the

force of the state and state-sanctioned media can silence dissenting voices. This

project brings those on the margins into the public sphere. One of the projects

founders Andrew McGregor explains their raison d'etre: "Having various interests

and groups of people able to articulate wishes and injustices is part of a democratic society. I think beyond the potential value of fragmentation, the belief and practice of incorrupt law modified by transparent, democratic institutions is paramount for such a society to exist. " (Popova 2010)

The Tiziano Project realized from the beginning that the only way for their project to work was to build connections with storytellers in the communities they choose. They believe every community has storytellers that the people know and trust and that by gaining their blessing, the community will follow. Their larger goal is to build a community of local journalists around the world in areas that have been left out of the discussion, an army of citizen journalists willing to teach others in their communities while using media to create jobs, all united by purpose, innovation, and collaboration.

Rather than building a community around the Tiziano Project, they feel that teaching journalism and storytelling skills will build stronger communities by allowing people in the previously marginalized populations to take responsibility for their own narratives. By telling their own stories to an outside audience they are able to enter the transnational public sphere with potentially more power than their local sphere. There is also the possibility to build cohesion among a larger community of people living in conflict zones, as well as a larger community of citizen journalists.

The Internet as a more democratic media

Sovereignty and Self-Determination

The influence of close contacts has been shown to be of considerable importance in building a community. The Tiziano Project does a lot of its work offline, on the ground in conflict zones, but one of its most successful community building experiences was in 2009 in Kurdistan. They were competing with a number of very large NGOs for a $25,000 grant from Chase Community Giving. But before they even hit the ground in Kurdistan, they were building a community of people who wanted them there. The other organizations vying for the grant had much larger mailing lists and significantly more Facebook followers, but it was the well-connected Kurdish diaspora that helped them win the grant. Kurds from all over the world were calling each other, explaining how to sign up for Facebook and vote. They were united behind the idea of bringing the Tiziano Project to Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan. So once they won the grant and arrived they already had the trust of the community.

Because Tiziano focuses on marginalized people in conflict zones, one of the strategies they have adopted is to always partner with local groups. This way they have an easy entry into communities that are accustomed to media coming into their localities that often is either out-of-touch or unsympathetic to their cultures, communities, and concerns. One of the strengths to their approach is that they enter without preconceived notions of the stories that need to be told. In Kurdistan they found that the stories the community wanted to tell were very

different from the ones they had assumed would be chosen. Instead of reporting on war and conflict, the students wanted to show the world what Kurdish life was about. They wanted to tell the stories of their culture that the mainstream media never shows because they have reduced Kurdistan to one story – conflict.   The stories they chose to tell gave a fuller view of the Kurdish people. The 360º Kurdistan site takes viewers deep into the culture from multiple entry points and includes stories of nomadic sheep farmers and pastry chefs, as well as personal narratives of Iraqi chemical attacks and stories of everyday Kurdish life. Taken together, the videos offer a rich view of the city of Erbil.

Idle No More is the first movement that has united disparate tribal groups all over Canada and then around the world, allowing them to talk about similar issues that affect them and to speak as a united voice. There has been Indigenous media for many years in Canada. The government created an Indigenous media network in 1983, but the very institutions that were subjugating the tribes from the beginning controlled it. Non-Indigenous people have run newspapers in Nunavut, and the voice and control of much of the media have been in the hands of the government or corporations. With the advent of the Internet many of the Indigenous communities have been able to have more community discussions, absent what they perceive as government oversight. Indigenous people have rallied and fought against the Canadian government for most of their 400 years of subjugation, but prior to Idle No More, most movements were limited to a particular province or tribe.

Idle No More is dedicated to community building and has grown to include people beyond the Indigenous community. Supporters have shown solidarity from as far away as New Zealand and the Middle East. Actions also took place all over the United States, Europe, Africa and Asia. The movement has been able to attract attention and gain support because the same problems exist around the world, with Indigenous peoples fighting related struggles; fracking and horizontal drilling for oil and tar-sands pipelines are also top environmental concerns of Native Americans, as well as human rights, tribal sovereignty and self-determination. Speaking as one voice consisting of many instead of having one surrogate speaking for them as they have for many years brings all tribal people together around a big idea.

Hundreds of Indigenous Americans and their supporters held a smart mob round dance at the Mall of America, as a part of the Idle No More protest movement and these events spread quickly across the continent.

In New Zealand Māori activists adopted the slogan of the movement. In a remote town in the Bay of Plenty region, Māori representatives of Te Whanau-a-Maruhaeremuri staged a protest in January 2013 that stopped a company removing shingle from their local river. They view Idle No More as a call to action for Indigenous people around the world. (Wilton and Barrington-Bush 2013)

Without social media keeping supporters current and providing places for discussion, these movements would not have connected. Multiple Facebook pages have been set up for local Idle No More groups around the world. These

groups have adopted the movement's tactics and events as well, streaming

seminars and teach-ins.

Audience

> *"Understand your audience and you will understand the impact of your*
> *message on each follower in your social media networks."*
> *— Matt Gentile*

Successful media activism requires an organization to know who their

audience is and tailor the message accordingly. Knowing where people go for

their information and what they do once they have received it can help focus on

the most effective strategies.

Mainstream media does not adequately cover much of the news that

affects Indigenous communities. The Idle No More audience began as a

Facebook group calling for a local rally and teach-in. It was speaking to a small

group for a single purposed but grew exponentially because the message rang

true for a much wider audience. In one year, the original Facebook page

spawned more than 100 local pages from around the world, and all carrying a

consistent message under the Idle No More banner. They each of them tailor

their messages to their local communities' needs and events, but all are centered

on Indigenous rights and environmental justice.

These Facebook pages, blogs and Twitter feeds have become de facto

news aggregators, feeding relevant articles to broad-based communities for

discussion and to be shared. This has given the communities a concentrated

diet of information significant to their issues.

"You are what you share."
— Charles Leadbeater, We Think: The Power Of Mass Creativity

Invisible Children's media campaigns are designed to reach a very specific audience, i.e. young people, wealthy people, white American people. The Kony 2012 YouTube data backs up the impression that they were aiming their messaging to and successfully reached a young demographic. The video was heavily viewed on mobile phones and was most popular with 13-17 year old females and 18-24 year old males. (Lotan 2012) They played to the younger demographic's belief in social media as a force for good, and were very aware that because young people are more social media savvy, they are more likely to share.

The Tiziano Project's audiences cut across many demographics. The StoriesFrom website and other parts of the project are designed to build an audience for marginalized narratives. The intent from the organization's perspective is to tell emic stories to etic audiences, but for the new citizen journalists their local audiences may be equally important. Part of the organization's mission is to change perceptions about people living in conflict zones, and that includes the way that people living through it view their lives. Major media reduces their cultures to stories about war, but by focusing on local culture the people are able to collectively show the world and themselves a fuller and more hopeful picture. And by not pushing any one narrative above any other, the audiences for the videos are expanded to include an incredibly broad range

of viewers who may come to the site to see one story, but stay to view another that addresses a different aspect of the culture.

Reach

> *Quit counting fans, followers and blog subscribers like bottle caps. Think, instead, about what you're hoping to achieve with and through the community that actually cares about what you're doing. - Amber Cadabra*

The ease of use of new media, cell phones, YouTube and other sharing technologies has made stories from Invisible Children, Idle No More and The Tiziano Project available to large, international audiences. Each sharer, each comment that accompanies a video, each discussion adds to the public sphere. One of the studies on the reasoning behind online sharing found that:

- *85% of people say that reading what others think in comments helps them understand and process information;*
- *84% claim they share because it is a way to support causes or issues they care about;*
- *73% say they process more thoroughly and deeply when it is shared.*
- *69% share links because it allows them to feel more involved in the world.*
- *68% share information to show others who they are by what they care about. (Bett 2013)*

People share online more often if the story or link has already amassed a number of other shares and likes. This is known as "the herding effect" and is seen more when the topic is related to culture and society, areas that may be more subjective social constructs. (Jha 2013) Studies have also shown that

some tweets and shares are more important than others. If decision makers

want to know what the people think, they need to look beyond the numbers to

see who are the people whose messages are being shared on a regular basis,

the people that others trust over time for valuable information, and what are they

saying. (Moeller 2011)

The use of video as a tool to reach audiences has grown in importance as

more and more people have access to computers and are accustomed to

receiving information visually. In fact, marketing research shows that viewers

retain 95% of a message when they watch it in a video compared to 10% when

reading it in text. (Invisia 2013) And studies have shown that on average, a web

visitor will spend about 10 more minutes on a web page that has videos than one

that does not, and those viewers are 65-85% more likely to engage with the

content of the site, including making donations. (Darrow 2013)

Idle No More Social Media Statistics *(As of Jan 3, 2014)*

Twitter	*5,543 Following* *19,672 Followers* *60+ Off-shoot Idle No More feeds*
Facebook	*122,546 likes* *100+ Idle No More group pages*
YouTube	*No Organization Page* *1,130,000 related videos*

Idle No More began from a single Facebook page, which limits who is a

part of the movement to those who use Facebook and those who have Internet

access. The platform allows people from all walks of life to enter the

conversation and to share information and conversation beyond Facebook to

other social media sites. And they are also clear that attracting a younger

generation to fight for Indigenous rights is part of their strategy. So using social

media works well to reach this media savvy part of the population. All the points

of entry, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, have been able to bring people who a

decade ago might not have been able to come together a place to be heard and

creates a united movement. That there is no leader or gatekeeper allows for a

wider range of opinions and discussions to take place, expanding the directions

the movement may go. The common denominator is opposition to governmental

and/or corporate exploitation of land, water, and Indigenous property/people.

Their online presence is very conversational and very informative.

Invisible Children Social Media Statistics *(as of Jan 3, 2014)*

Twitter	*Invisible Children US* *1,200 Following* *278,292 Followers* *Invisible Children Europe* *293 Following* *2,710 Followers* *70+ Off-shoot Invisible Children feeds*
Facebook	*3,386,608 likes* *100+ Invisible Children group pages*
YouTube	*Dedicated page with Fundraising* *264,408 subscribers* *736,000 videos*

Invisible Children's messaging is very specifically aimed at a young social

media demographic. They were most heavily viewed by people 13-24 years old.

The voice is entirely one way but they create opportunities to be recognized.

They upload a video nearly every other day. In addition, they have set up ways

to attract people back to their page. They have created a contest where their

supporters compete to be the biggest fundraiser online, and they are giving away

trips to Uganda. Both of these contests play on the idea of becoming a star within

the movement. While publicizing big donors or winners has always be a funding

tool, the online component means it has reach and isn't said just once, but lasts

over time. Online mentions will come up for years to come. They use people's

desire for fame well.

Tiziano Project Social Media Statistics *(as of Jan 3, 2014)*

Twitter	905 Following
	1,337 Followers
Facebook	1,219 likes
	3 closed group pages
YouTube	Dedicated Page
	117 subscribers
	42,400 videos

The Tiziano Project's social media reach and use for their own purposes

are very limited, but they are not trying to gain attention for their organization.

They use social media mainly in the ramp-up to a program and during the

program to involve the communities. They are also wary of using social media in

some locales because attention may put journalists at risk in conflict regions. The

key to their program is having people make films to express their cultures to the

outside world, and to that end they have set up their own network that the people

who make videos during and after their workshops can access and share.

Audience Building

Who can make a movie, produce a video, or reach an audience has

changed drastically in the past ten years with new affordable technologies, but

who might see it is still a conundrum. Where your video comes up in an online search or whether you have the network to make it big on Facebook, YouTube or other social media may limit the access and the reach.

For The Tiziano Project the manner of showcasing the stories is as important as getting them made. They feel that having all the videos by all their newly minted citizen journalists in one place creates a more powerful message than if they were spread around the web on YouTube, or Vimeo, or Flickr. Their StoriesFrom platform allows people to shoot, edit, and publish their stories from an iPad, and allows viewers to see the pieces on a map as well as in a tiled view that links them all together, but allows the user to choose where to enter. The site allows stories to be immersive and complementary. They also envision the site evolving to include stories from other communities working in similar ways.

Major media is using more and more user generated content, but usually, like CNN's iReport, those pieces are treated with less weight than stories they produce themselves. The Tiziano Project's site gives equal weight to their citizen journalists and the professionals that are reporting on the same subjects so that visitors to the site receive a fuller perspective on the culture.

In addition to the StoriesFrom platform Tiziano is working on a site for people to crowd source translations, since news is created in local languages and only enormous media entities usually have the resources to translate, so stories from foreign media are ignored. In addition, parachute journalists frequently seek out English speakers to interview, no matter where they are shooting, and these people may not be the most knowledgeable about any given

subject. A translation of an interesting story in a foreign language means it can reach much wider audiences.

But this limits reach or audience. Who knows about this network? How would the rest of the world find out about it if they didn't know one of the citizen journalists? By partnering in each project with media professionals, they are assured that people within the journalistic world will see the videos, but so far, the reach is still very limited.

Comparing the above social media statistics would seem to show that Invisible Children is more successful at building on online audience, but as many scholars point out, Facebook likes do not necessarily translate into action. Idle No More with far fewer likes and videos is regularly able to rally their supporters for protests and events. They've also spawned many local and international Facebook pages that share content, expanding their reach, as well as widening the discussion and bringing new voices to the movement.

The online presence does not always translate to offline commitment, as was the case with the Kony 2012 event that fizzled despite the number of people who signed on to participate. While the Tiziano Project does not have a big social media presence, that is not an accurate indicator of the support from the communities they work with or the success of the program; rather it is a reflection of the fact that that they do not see social media as important for the organization to meet its own goals. Their interest in social media is more in teaching their new citizen journalists to use it wisely.

The significance of social media for Invisible Children cannot be ignored. They were masterful in building their early networks and using a combination of social media platforms to saturate the web with their message. They now have an enormous community of potential activists for future events. Invisible Children understood the importance of targeting a specific audience.

Idle No More has attracted a number of different constituencies, each contributing to their power in different ways. While the Indigenous sphere was their first target, their publicity tactics have brought their cause into a wider public sphere and attracted other groups who have now joined them in pressuring the government, as well as the corporations that are despoiling the land.

Siloing

Idle No More began as a group of Indigenous people speaking with other Indigenous people. But others entered the silo, drawn by the issue though not a part of the original community. These others, however, were also people who already had strong beliefs about the very issues Idle No More is pushing – environmentalists and other Aboriginal people.

Invisible Children attracted an enormous audience, but they were mainly a homogeneous group of young white Americans. But they are very different from Idle No More, in that there are not two sides to their issue. Everyone agrees that there should be no child soldiers, and their main thrust is to fund their work and lobby for more funding for government aid. In their case, the issue is more that the information does not get shared with everyone equally. Their messaging was designed to appeal to the group that they believed was most susceptible to it.

Ugandans were outside the silo, though their displeasure was not factored into the strategy. Young white Americans had the money and the networks. For their work, the silos that support them have served them very well. As a strategy, preaching to their consciously built silos has served them very well.

The Tiziano Project's job is to fight against the media's tendency to tell stories from an outsider perspective, to break into the silos that keep local narratives from international journalism. The stories that have come from the communities they target have usually come from parachute journalists, news people who come in for a day or two, shoot a short segment that buttresses the stereotypical view of the culture, and leave. These pieces keep them siloed, since the authentic stories are only told and read by their communities. So this project gets them into a wider audience, out of the silo.

Gatekeepers and Mass Media Marginalization

The healthy public sphere rests on the idea that people have access all the information they need to make informed decisions. And people look to the press to inform and contextualize major events and issues that affect them. But with mass media consolidation and the commercialization of the news, stories that matter have lost air and page time to the sensational and celebrity gossip. And the powers in charge, the gatekeepers, tend to feed the people stories based on ratings in order to fulfill their obligations to shareholders rather than fulfilling their civic obligation to keep the populace well informed.

The Internet seemed like the perfect medium to pick up the mantle and provide people with the stories that never make it to mass media, and there are plenty of sites that deliver information that would not be found in major newspapers or on mainstream television. But the Internet has in many ways mirrored off-line media. Google ranks news from the mainstream higher in their searches. The same corporations that own mainstream press offline have an oversized presence and influence online. So the question of how to rise above the din is critical for a media campaign.

The Tiziano Project hopes to sidestep the gatekeeper problem in several ways. Instead of competing with millions of other videos on YouTube, they designed an online platform for dissemination of content. It is a one-stop platform for all their producers to share content alongside the professional journalists that are a part of the trainings. They are aware that if they want to enter the world of mass media journalism they have to deal with gatekeepers. However, much of the power is in their hands since the big media producers cannot or will not come into these conflict zones because of the danger, so they are empowered by the possibility of being the sole destination for professional local content.

The Idle No More bloggers, Tweeters, and online community have been crucial in speaking back to the mainstream media's portrayal of the movement and of Indigenous people in general. The Canadian press has a history of very negative stereotyping of Indigenous issues and actions. Indigenous people in Canada have rarely been allowed to represent themselves in mass media and have grown accustomed to the stereotypes used to describe their culture, which

they see as a continuation of colonial ideology. (Simpson 2013) During recent protests they have been depicted as terrorists or an angry mob by certain Canadian networks, and few have given a nuanced and contextualized report on the movement. They have failed to put it in cultural perspective and the same kinds of criticism that were leveled at Occupy Wall Street, especially the absence of a leader and simple list of demands, are used to discredit the entire movement. Television coverage of the movement has rarely included an Indigenous commentator or even one of the many Canadian academics with expertise on Indigenous issues.

There is a great need for other voices, counterpoints to the mass media representation of the movement. Idle No More's online presence keeps their community current and mainstream press finds it hard to ignore. They have become well enough known that news articles about any Indigenous event in Canada now frequently refer to Idle No More with no explanation as to who they are. The counterview from the Indigenous perspective on The Aboriginal People's Television Network (APTN) has been somewhat successful in forcing the mainstream media to report news they might have once overlooked. But it is the online gatekeeper-free community that has moved the movement into the nations' public sphere. Since they have no central leadership, information flows from many sources at once, giving a fuller and more layered view of the issues and actions. Blogs like dividednomore; Decolonizing: Indigeneity, Education & Society; mediaIndigena; and Decolonizing Media have written powerful

responses to the mainstream view, brought new voices into the discussion, and attracted audiences of non-Indigenous people to the cause.

Invisible Children also designed its media strategy around social media, primarily using Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, alongside their media-heavy website. They have created highly sharable content, but by limiting comments to specific posts, they minimize discussion, discourage two-way communications, and act as gatekeepers. On the blog posts that have a comments section, there are rarely comments; it reads like the newsletter of old. They mainly post calls for donations and news about Joseph Kony, returning child soldiers and their families, and the LRA. This strategy works for people who participate through likes, shares, and donations but prefer to do it quickly and without getting too involved (aka the "slacktivists").

When the Kony 2012 campaign went massively viral, every media outlet in the country dissected their relatively unknown organization. This was the flip side to organizations hoping for mass media coverage. They did not seek it and once the mainstream media got hold of their story, Invisible Children was powerless to control their image.

Alternative media

Community media

> "Evolution is evolution – and it's happened before us and will continue after we're gone. But, what's taking place now is much more than change for the sake of change. The socialization of content creation, consumption and participation, is hastening the metamorphosis that transforms everyday people into participants of a powerful and valuable media literate society." - Brian Solis

There is no such thing as an objective report. All stories are framed by the teller. Whereas mass media owned by corporations gets to frame the conflict or the issue as it benefits them, citizen journalists can frame the issues as they impact the community. Whereas mass media simplifies complex problems into sound bites, citizen journalists create narratives that serve to widen the discussion and educate people about multiple viewpoints.

One of the hallmarks of new media is the way it is turning media consumers into producers. Anyone with a cell phone or an iPad can now possibly reach millions of online viewers with their story. But the mere access to new-media tools and platforms does not necessarily lead to well-made, decentralized, mass-driven reporting. The difference between information gathering and real journalistic practice is compelling storytelling with investigative rigor, alongside the mastery of the technology.

The Tiziano Project's stories are generated by people who need to tell their own stories. One of their underlying beliefs is that journalism is moving towards a more collaborative model, where all sides of a story may be told. Instead of just seeing a conflict, they want to put it into a context with the community. By humanizing narratives they bring an entirely different experience to news.

The Tiziano Project founders try hard to distance themselves from the concept of media as activism, because they are most interested in teaching journalistic objectivity, but they acknowledge that putting these skills in the hands to the people whose story is being told has the potential to change perceptions

and affect policy. What they are trying to do is elevate the concept and quality of community journalism. They want it to be seen as a valuable resource and taken as seriously as news from the major players. They feel that a first hand account from those affected needs to be on equal footing with professionals who cannot fathom what daily life is like in a war zone. And their emphasis on teaching journalistic ethics and research techniques distinguishes them from other organizations that teach technology without stressing the need for accuracy and impartiality. There is a very high percentage of youth in conflict zones. In many of the refugee camps the average age is under 25. Story telling about their lives and cultures connects them with a life they lost and hope to go back to. And it is a way to change the 'single story" perceptions of the outside world around their cultures in a very proactive and peaceful way.

Idle No More has depended on alternative media because the mainstream media in Canada was not telling their story. The stories were told very differently in different media, with the mainstream press frequently echoing the government line, as well as taking a very anti-tribal tone. Idle No More's citizen journalists, the bloggers and media makers, connect stories of Indigenous people around the world into a shared narrative. Hearing the story of another Indigenous group's success gives others hope and incentive to speak up. And using the strategies and tactics that worked for another group spreads the movement. New media allows them to see the similarities in a way that would not have happened a few decades ago. Idle No More is one part of a much larger 21st century international

Indigenous Rights Movement, and references to it appear in many blogs and stories from around the world, buttressing the wider movement.

Invisible Children does not rely on alternative media because it is a very mainstream story. They have consciously used social media to spread their videos, but it was the alternative media that exposed many of the contradictions about the Kony 2012 video and brought them to the attention of the mainstream press. They have, however, shared stories of Uganda with people who would have never known what it looked like. Perhaps learning from the backlash to the Kony 2012 video campaign, their newest videos and online messaging are focused on the people of Uganda and their stories, particularly the returning child soldiers. And there are now local stories and Ugandan citizen journalists and bloggers included in the mix.

Tactical media

Using every media outlet available builds exponential buzz. The Kony 2012 video release was an immense media campaign that took advantage of free media, mainly YouTube and Facebook to spread one video around the world. It was by far the largest media push that Invisible Children had done up to that point. Their idea was to go to the audience they wanted to reach outside of the mainstream media, using social media alone. It was a media sensation, crossing over to the mainstream press, reaching a diverse group beyond their initial network for a number of reasons. One of the best tactics was having a pre-existing network in place that was coordinated to promote the video all at once. They also had their supporters barrage a curated list of celebrities for their

support by designing a one-click Twitter page with the targeted stars, and once they were on board, the campaign was more attractive to many others.

Idle No More has used a different approach to gain attention. They have created a uniquely cultural expression for their protests, the drumming smart mob, and hundreds of amateur YouTube videos have been posted and shared. There have been thousands of flash mob videos posted over the past several years, but it was the "exotic" take on it that elevated it above the others; the unusual raises the visibility and builds community at the same time. The smart mobs spread throughout Canada and some of the biggest were in the US in solidarity.

The tactic that got them the most attention in Canada and made Idle No More famous was not a social media tactic at all. They got the most attention when Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence went on a hunger strike demanding a face-to-face meeting with Prime Minister Stephen Harper to discuss Indigenous rights. She spent her time in a tipi on the frozen Ottawa River facing Parliament Hill, and the major media tracked the story closely. Idle No More picked up steam because the way the major media handled the hunger strike. A lot of the coverage was not favorable, which stirred the Indigenous community even more. Because of people's feelings about the mainstream press, negative publicity was a uniting force, as they defended the cause. And it brought new supporters on board.

Another not-strictly-social media tactic that they used to garner attention what when they linked their call for a national day of action to Amnesty

International's International Day of Human Rights. This international event already had a certain cache with the mainstream news media. Without producing their own media, Idle No More was able to again attract major media coverage.

Celebrities

All of the organizations use celebrities to garner attention and support. Invisible Children is the most obvious in their campaigns with specifically targeting celebrities who are big users of social media, assuring them ready-made networks. Idle No More has benefitted from the publicity surrounding its famous Indigenous supporters like Buffy Sainte-Marie, as well as environmental stars like Bill McKibben. And even The Tiziano project seeks out local celebrities in the communities they will be going to, to gain trust and publicity for projects. They have also entered film festivals to gain visibility in the media world.

Celebrities bring enormous fan bases and major media attention to a cause, but can also damage a movement when they are closely linked because their other activities may reflect badly on the organization. In addition, they frequently do not have as good a grasp of the facts and can mislead the public on important issues. A recent study (De Los Salmones 2013) showed that the following actions were most important for non-profits using celebrities in their media strategies:

- *Only use celebrities with high credibility, expertise and trustworthiness*
- *Having a high level of credibility as an organization will attract credible stars.*
- *The celebrity needs to seem a good fit with the social cause. More is not better.*
- *Don't use a celebrity who doesn't authentically believe in the social cause. If it is about their reputation rather than the organization, rethink it.*

- *Look for a star that is admired by your target audience. Be sure they are admired, not merely popular.*
- *Be certain that your audience finds the use of celebrities in advertising an acceptable practice.*

Celebrities may have disproportionate influence, so organizations must balance the need for attention with the kind of attention celebrities will add. Since celebrities by definition are already in the public sphere, and most groups have difficulty making news, partnering with celebrities through social media pushes messages out to the celebrities' network and celebrity news watchers easily expanding the potential support for an issue.

Online mobilization
Moving from online connections to offline action

Once the organization has attracted attention, they must turn that attention into action. So just how much does social media affect action? A study from The University of California San Diego showed that strong ties are much more influential than weak ties. Close friends exerted about four times more influence on people's action than a great message from an unknown person or organization. (Bond, et al. 2012) So building a highly engaged and passionate community becomes exponentially important for any organization that plans for action.

When Invisible Children released their Kony 2012 video, they asked people to join a future protest and be a part of a movement. Millions of people signed up. One of the biggest reasons for this was the well-connected network they had in place. And the data showed that the movement did not come out of

big cities or organizations using big email lists, but from small to medium sized

cities. They were particularly influential with Christian youth, as evidenced by

Biblical psalms on their Twitter biographies.

They built the organization on a mission to make young people feel they

can change the world. And most importantly they understood that it was an

effective solidarity message that young people can save other young people.

Once the small tight-knit group kicked off the campaign, the larger community's

willingness to share was a consequence of making them feel they belonged to

something bigger, and that was a project with a long-term goal. Invisible Children

gave people a task to do after they watched the film at the point when their

emotions had been aroused. This made them feel involved. Their mobilization

philosophy is centered on "one-click" engagements, exemplified by their

campaign to make tweeting to policy- and culture-makers something anyone

could do with minimal effort. The 5,000 Twitter users who first posted the video

came from a "highly connected groups of users," according to data analyzed by

SocialFlow, a social-network monitoring site. (SocialFlow 2012)   #Kony2012 was

trending several days before the video launched, indicating a very tight knit

network gearing up for a big push. The amount of coordinated traffic was small,

but amount of traffic the group was able to generate has been compared to a

complex computer marketing program.

Although the Kony 2012 campaign had millions of supporters sign up for

their "Blanket The Night", it did not come off as planned. Prior to the planned

protest that was the culminating event for the Kony 2012 campaign, the

organization had a series of high-profile problems.   Not only was the organization now under a microscope, the very intent of the protest was thrown into question. Ultimately the event was very poorly attended.   Though the organization tried to respond, it was reeling from bad press and their follow-up film, "Kony 2012 Pt. II – Beyond Famous" did not generate anywhere near the number of views as the original. Nonetheless, Kony Pt. II was still in the top tier for non-profit campaigns, indicating that while the organization suffered, their social media outreach still outpaced most other organizations in the US.

Despite the challenges faced by the organization in 2012, Invisible Children affected the policy of the US. The organization's less well-known Global Night Commute in 2006 did more to build the community that the Kony 2012 campaign. It was these young activists who subsequently went to Washington and were part of the advocacy that pushed Congress to pass The Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act in 2010. Prior to the Kony video, the US had already agreed to send military advisors to aid in the hunt for Kony and he was already on the International Criminal Court's list of most wanted.

Idle No More is a study in contrast to the slacktivist design of the Kony 2012 campaign. Though it has had an important online component, its real power has been its ability to unite supporters for rallies and teach-ins by appealing on an emotional level to local and indigenous communities. These communities have strong ties, brought together through family, community, and tribal identities. The movement has been able to bring larger and larger groups

together perhaps because they have no single leader. This "participatory democracy" model allows every participant to feel engaged, and by allowing a wide variety of constituents to come at the same issues with their own input, they are able to tie their events together for a larger footprint. In this case the Internet has been a tool for communication and collaboration of communities that are working together in a wide array of locations, much like what was seen in with Occupy Wall Street.

The importance of dialogue, storytelling, and medium

> *"The minute news hits the wires, it becomes a conversation. It's just a question of how high [the] volume [of] that conversation will become."*
> *– Doug Frisbie*

Stories bring people together, because narratives are more persuasive than facts and figures. In order to understand a problem and hope to change it, you have to understand not the just story of it at this moment, but the stories that undergird it. When we hear a story, we have certain assumptions or "learned truths" that color how we hear it, and unless we can change those stories below the stories, we cannot change a thing. These assumption stories, some long engrained as truth, come from the dominant culture and have the power to validate the status quo.

For change to happen new stories must be told, old silenced stories must be retold, and people must both question the stories they know and create more powerful stories. Once the assumptions holding status quo in place are understood, people must identify the stories they want to push. Just as the dominant culture uses narratives to insert their bias into the popular culture,

activists can create their own powerful memes, even by coopting already established ones. But first they must know the stories they want to (re)use.

Story-based strategies can amplify the voices of the impacted people telling their own story, putting the community front and center. But the story does not need to be heard in a lengthy narrative; it can be told in one great image, one perfectly resonating sound bite or slogan, one extremely cleverly conceived campaign that retells a story in their own words, as it creates the possibility of a different future reality. The 1971 Keep America Beautiful "Crying Indian ad" was effective because it told a simple story everyone could understand, of a strong Native American man weeping over the loss of his beautiful land, and gave the audience a way to help. One of the most powerful photographs of the 60s anti-war movement was Marc Riboud's image of a girl holding a daisy as soldiers wield bayonets in front of her. The key to success is the creation of a meme that has the narrative power to outlast the opposition and interrupt the retelling of the popular story, and catch fire with the world.

We are bombarded with messages every day from every form of media at once and the job for activists is to find a way to rise above the din and connect their message to a person. The Internet has made delivery easier, but putting the message in front of the audience that will be moved may be harder. Slogging through Facebook or other sites, we have learned to be more selective of the information we consume, choosing the kinds and forms we want to inform us, and siloing ourselves away from ideas and opinions that challenge our basic beliefs. There are very few sites that bring a real mix of information to the people

because the market drives the content. Online story telling and sharing of information creates a shared understanding between people across many boundaries, enhancing the public sphere.

For all of three of these organizations, their goal is social change. And social change does not happen in a vacuum. It is an alteration of the social order, in the institutions and behaviors of society, and in the way we all see the world. Stories that change hearts and minds are based on perceptions and on emotional connections. One of the things all three organizations do well is focus not just on delivering information, but on using story as a compelling device to motivate attention and action. There are lessons to be learned from each organization's approach and challenges.

Invisible Children

Invisible Children's new media campaign was designed to release videos online that would inspire hope, action and engagement. By the time Kony 2012 was ready to be released, Invisible Children had built such a strong network that their first 5000 Tweets spread the message faster than any other in history. At a staggering 100 million views for their video, they got 200 times the views they expected. What made it successful was effective storytelling combined with making it very easy for people to share.

One key to their success was in keeping the message simple, and giving their supporters something to do online so they felt they were a part of something bigger. Many who shared the Kony 2012 video added their own messages of hope. These personal endorsements, which helped to push the story, out faster and made the viewers more likely to view the film in a positive light.

Another critical piece of their strategy was to target celebrities, particularly long-time supporter Kristen Bell (who alone has half a million Twitter followers). The mainstream press is much more likely to follow a story if there is a celebrity present; it feeds a publicity spiral. They used the concept of celebrity in creative ways as well: they framed warload Kony as seeking fame, playing on the idea that he was trying to make a name for himself. They turned that back on him in order to catch him. And the current campaigns use of the word famous for its supporters connects Invisible Children with fame as a brand.

The Kony 2012 video went viral, but Invisible Children used the Internet primarily as a content delivery system, looking only for people to sign a petition and send in some money. The storytelling did not leave room for dialogue. It did not use the platform to collaborate or communicate; they did not invite a larger discussion or try to create a platform for other organizations dealing with child soldiers around the world to join in their fight.

For all the fanfare and media attention that the video created, the actual live event -- to carpet the world with Kony posters -- was generally considered a failure. This lack of turn out could be the result of a number of problems.

The first was a problem with what they did well -- targeting and reaching their primary young American audience. The "other" audiences' reactions took them by surprise, most notably when the Kony 2012 film was shown to people in Uganda. Riots broke out at a major screening and contributed to a negative media backlash to the film in the US. Ugandans felt that their country was unfairly portrayed in the film. They rejected the image that made them appear to be helpless victims desperate for the Americans to come to their rescue. The people in the film felt they had been exploited and misrepresented, and they were incensed that there were no stakeholders consulted on the film at all.

Some of the loudest criticisms were from journalists who called the film out on its facts, noting that Kony had not been in Uganda for many years, and that the film suggested that a complex issue had a simplistic solution. Ugandan journalist Angelo Opiaiya Izama summed up one of its biggest problems:

> "The simplicity of the "good versus evil", where good is inevitably white/western and bad is black or African, is also reminiscent of some of the worst excesses of the colonial era interventions. These campaigns don't just lack scholarship or nuance. They are not bothered to seek it." (Beckett 2013)

The Kony 2012 story was the personal response of the American host, an outsider to the local community. It was an etic approach, which put the power entirely in the American filmmakers' hands. It was framed as a story of the Great White Savior, and did not include the Ugandans in telling their own story. The Ugandans in the film were mere props for another person's agenda. Invisible Children told a different story from the one the locals would have told, a

simplification of the situation, omitting current history to make it a more compelling narrative.

People with knowledge of the situation on the ground also accused the filmmakers of manipulating the facts for monetary gain. What was being done with all the money raised from the video came into question and Invisible Children did not have a ready answer. It was further revealed that there was an evangelical underpinning to the organization, which was significant to a lot of their secular and progressive backers who felt misled. The feel good vibe around the film quickly turned sour.

Another criticism was that it was just "slacktivism." Most people's engagement was to click "like" and send a bit of money. This attracted many people who were more comfortable feeling part of an online community than taking to the streets.

And just ten days after the original video was released the man at the center of the film, Jason Russell, was found wandering the streets of San Diego naked and confused, which took the focus away from the campaign and moved it to speculations about the man.

The dialogue that followed the media backlash to the film had a transformative effect on the organization. By learning from their mistakes, the organization's new emphasis on the feel good stories of returning child soldiers

and their families gives supporters a feeling that they have done something successful and keeps them involved.

Despite massive PR failures they did meet their stated goals. The Kony 2012 campaign informed a huge swath of the population about the existence of child soldiers and the monsters who exploit them. They brought a war criminal out of obscurity and focused an international gaze on him. Their work resulted in a very rare bi-partisan initiative in the US Senate that was signed within just 2 months and motivated governments around the world to pay attention to what was happening in Uganda. They brought a lot of young people into a discussion about their power to change the world. Their media campaign reached a lot of people for little money and very quickly. The campaign shows how new media can be used to deliver a well-marketed narrative throughout the world at lightning speed, but also highlights the challenges of what can happen when media attention scales faster than an organization can adapt. It is also a cautionary tale for media strategists about authenticity, cultural awareness, emic approaches, and how to keep audiences engaged over the long term.

Idle No More

Idle No More has used social media to give a group voice, cohesion, and a platform on which to exercise their agency. The founders of Idle No More started their Facebook page as a way to foster engagement and dialogue. Though they use a variety of tools and platforms to reach out and make connections, including video and Twitter, Facebook is their primary clearinghouse for news and calls to action. People who join their Facebook page

have access to up-to-date news, and a community of people to discuss that news with, and links to a wide range of content.

Idle No More also had some media savvy supporters early on who set up a Twitter account and encouraged the use of #IdleNoMore to bring more attention to the movement. They were aware that journalists heavily use Twitter. If it is trending on Twitter, the mainstream media pays attention.

Facebook and Twitter have spawned wide-ranging Idle No More discussions. The instantaneousness of the Internet allows people to stay in real-time contact and keeps people involved. Idle No More's mission is to organize around the tribal view of the earth and the land. By framing their cause around traditional Indigenous sovereignty and stewardship of the earth, environmental and social justice groups have joined to fight issues of common concern. It has allowed people around the world to see that some problems are ubiquitous and to share tactics and stories of pushback. They have united formerly disenfranchised groups of people to build a stronger group beyond the Indigenous community.

In Canada the groups have focused on getting a seat at the policy-making and decision-making table. They not only put the issues that affect the Indigenous people of Canada on the national agenda but they gained recognition as legitimate actors on environmental issues, even getting a meeting with the Prime Minister.

As they gather more supporters and new members, the message has become more universal. The community is created by interaction. The stories

that are shared come largely from an emic perspective, but resonate across communities. Environmental groups and Indigenous groups far from Canada have joined together, and anyone with access to the Internet has become part of the group, multiplying the power and the message. This cross-cultural partnership, and being able to share strategies and success stories benefits all. The online dialogue has created a much wider community of action.

The Tiziano Project

The Tiziano medium is digital storytelling and the platform on which to share the work of the citizen journalists. The Internet has in this way become a medium for the unheard to be heard and for the stories that are silenced and ignored to be seen and shared. This is critical, especially in places where the mainstream media and messages are controlled. And part of their lesson plans for their new citizen journalists is the importance of using social media to their advantage.

The Tiziano Project's mantra for their students is, "Speak for yourselves." They recruit young people who are already media literate, but have no journalistic skills and give them the ability to mobilize through stories that they feel strongly about. Changing status quo and giving depth to the context is one of the goals of the Tiziano Project, but that can be very challenging. Media skills can be used to promote a variety of viewpoints, and media activism itself can breed resistance to journalistic freedom. This came into sharp focus for The Tiziano Project when they were teaching in the West Bank. Their Palestinian students, who share strong political ties brought about through the social and

political realities of daily life in the Occupied Territories, threatened to boycott the program if Israelis were trained to tell the "other side" of a story. This example of how strong community ties can become a hindrance to journalistic freedom caught the Tiziano Project by surprise. In most conflict zone communities there are clear divisions and opposing sides, and though the mantra "speak for yourselves" is a good one, it can be a challenge when groups cannot share common perspectives. As a journalism organization that is dedicated to working in conflict and post-conflict regions with the aim of fostering understanding through storytelling, this kind of demand from their students could not be accepted. They drew a line in the sand, telling the participants that they could not dictate what the organization would do. Three weeks into the program, their Palestinian partners terminated their contract. Moving on to Jerusalem, they found that the Israeli government had heard of the program and would not allow several of them entry. By entering overland through Jordan, they were able to return and expected to run concurrent workshops in East Jerusalem with Palestinians and in West Jerusalem with Israelis. While the Israeli program was cancelled due to lack of interest, the Palestinian program was a success.

An important lesson from that experience for the Tiziano Project was that every group in a conflict zone has a moment of conflict over journalistic ethics, when they realize that the stories they have been telling are built upon their own biases. The Tiziano Project has learned that they have to begin by building trust with and within the group they are mentoring. One of the tools they teach is how to tell stories without making the audience hate the other side. They are very

conscious that certain words incite rather than communicate, and that understanding is the path to peace. The final stories that came from the East Jerusalem students are great examples of this. Together they paint a vivid picture of Palestinian daily life in East Jerusalem, from memories of their history before the state of Israel, to the quotidian life separated from politics.

The Tiziano Project takes a strong emic approach, empowering people with the tools to tell their own stories, from their own perspectives. They realized that the culture was the instigator of the story. Andrew McGregor, one of the co-founders grew up in Littleton, Colorado, the town that was at the center of the Columbine shooting in 1999. His memory of the ways that the media portrayed what happened there colored his understanding of those in conflict zones:

> I remember the added pain of having the media elite fly in to Littleton and dictate the meaning of the tragedy to the community and the nation. It's hard to permit an understanding of human nature for things like Columbine, but it was our tragedy, and others came in and exploited it for morally and professionally bankrupt self-aggrandizement. I had an instinct that people in Rwanda would feel the same way about the genocide, only much deeper and more profound. So the opportunity to tell their own story in their own way would be considered a sacred right. (Popova 2010)

The Tiziano Project makes sure to seek out the storytellers in each locality as the first step to enter a community. With or without media, there are people in every culture who are the storytellers. Communities know who they are and respect them. Sometimes they are activists and some come from the organizations that brought Tiziano there. Many of these storytellers have been waiting to tell their stories for a very long time. Partnering with them, Tiziano shows respect for the culture and adds the best storytellers to the project.

When the founders first went to Iraq they brainstormed stories ideas for their students to cover, but were surprised to find that the students had a longer list of more significant stories they wanted to tell. They learned in Jerusalem how critical cultural understanding of the situation is to their work. The experience taught them an important lesson about separating activism from empowering journalists. They walk a fine line between the two and feel it is important that they not overtly push activist causes, but rather enable everyday community members to share their stories, which may include partisan messaging, but in a high-quality, journalistic manner, while connecting those local perspectives with global audiences.

For The Tiziano Project storytelling is the key to peace. And it is as important as learning the technology. By bringing homemade videos up to journalistic standards, the stories are more likely to be picked up and viewed by an outside audience.

Tiziano Project graduates are expected to begin discussions in their communities. The Tiziano Project's reach is small and growing slowly because it is spread through their workshops and through personal networks. The StoriesFrom platform allows for discussion with the makers of the videos, but does not have the capacity for a larger open discussion. It gives the viewer a comments section, but is less interactive that the rest of the technology on the platform. If they had more places for dialogue it could help them build wider communities of support, like the Idle No More Community. Part of their strategy is to teach their students to teach others, so their network may grow

exponentially in the future. This is where the Internet has the greatest promise, in helping individuals share and distribute important stories with much broader audiences that can get involved.

Their long-term goal is to train "an army of citizen journalists." Through their journalistic skills the young people will know how to use social media and technology to tell the stories of their communities, prevent past atrocities from repeating themselves, chart their own course, lead their own movements and develop appropriate local strategies. This project is all about potential. There are only around 100 graduates so far. The success of the program and of the participants is in understanding the power of media, especially independent journalism to make the world more understandable as a way to engage and empower global communities that would be hard to reach through traditional activism.

These three case studies all show the power of being able to speak openly and with a community about issues that matter to them. Whether it is because the government limits discussion or the media ignores them, many communities lack a voice in the public sphere. These approaches, telling a communities story, creating a platform for members of a community to engage in dialogue, and equipping community members with better tools to tell their stories all help expand the perspectives influencing the public sphere.

Producing and distributing information

Anyone can make a movie now. So you need to stand out. Frequently, in the competition for attention online style wins over substance, and the truth takes

a back seat to flashiness. However, as the case studies show, in order to mobilize communities and generate rich, broad-based discussion, high production values alone do not suffice. While Idle No More doesn't have high production value videos or a polished website, there is more discussion on the social media platforms they use about their raison d'etre than Invisible Children or The Tiziano Project. Invisible Children and The Tiziano Project both have media with much higher production values, but they have concentrated on the media over the community discussion part.

Idle No More's videos mirror the movement in that they are very grassroots; they are and look amateur. But in some ways that is appropriate for this movement that is dedicated to everyday people fighting against corporate interests. Their smart mob/dance circle videos are raw and from the people.

The skills The Tiziano Project is teaching are state of the art, and allow the students to produce video stories on a par with professional news organizations. The way that affordable and accessible technology has become ubiquitous makes this kind of storytelling easier and easier. They are mindful of the fact that news viewers expect a certain level of audio and visual quality in order to feel that a story is credible. They are less interested in going viral on YouTube, than getting the attention of the mainstream press around an issue of importance. In fact, they designed their own platform to aggregate the videos from all their newly minted journalists from around the world intentionally to separate themselves from the amateurs.

The videos derive from very personal experiences, but the production values make them feel professional. Some of the stories are told in still images with sound, others are slide shows with written stories, and some are full video narratives. The sound and visuals are clear and the stories are compelling with well-drawn narratives supported by journalistic standards. Their addition to mass media news coverage of these pieces would give viewers an entirely different and more humanized vision of their cultures.

The Power of Video and a Compelling Storyline

The Kony 2012 video had a high production value with a very consciously manipulative storyline. The key to the success of the video going viral was its very calculated design, using words and concepts that resonate with the age group of their targeted audience.

The film begins by noting "there are more people on Facebook now than there were on the planet 200 years ago," and moves on to alert viewers that, "humanity's greatest desire is to belong and connect." It then touts the genius of the Internet to bring us all together and asks everyone to join in this "experiment." Narrated by Jason Russell, the video makes the campaign very personal and the crimes of Joseph Kony visceral. It suggests that the Internet and its power are scary to older generations, as well as governments, and that the young generation at which this video is aimed can change the world by joining together. It continually throughout beats the drum of young people power.

Russell uses his own adorable little blonde 5-year-old son to sell the concept, at one point explaining the problem in such simple terms that even he

can understand. He then switches to another young boy, Jacob the child he met in Uganda that sparked his quest, who describes seeing his own dear brother hacked to death and tells of the fear of being abducted by Kony and his men. Russell tells us that he made a promise to help and that "we" can stop this horror and if we succeed we can "change the course of history." He imbues the viewers with the sense of having a lot of power to effect change.

The film gives some background on Kony, noting that the International Criminal Court indicted him a decade ago, and empowering the viewers with aiding in finally bringing one of the world's most wanted criminals to justice. The problem from Invisible Children's perspective is simply that not enough people know about Joseph Kony. But if the world knew, he'd be caught. They'd been trying with limited success to enlist the US government in the cause through their initial movie. They'd been doing good works without anyone else's help: rebuilding schools, creating jobs, even building an early warning system to alert villages when the rebels were in the vicinity. And they reiterate, this was done by "an army of young people."

Russell tells the audience that Invisible Children stepped in to become the voice for these children and made them visible to Washington because no one else would. And, he insists, "for the first time in history" our government took action because the people demanded it. Again he is empowering his supporters.

And from there, almost the end of the video, the reason for this campaign becomes clear. Yes, there are 100 US advisors in Uganda, but if the audience of this video does not do something, then they will give up and come home and all

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of Invisible Children's work so far will have been for naught. And the way to make the US Government know that this is important is to make Kony the most famous person in the world. And just so the viewers know that this is really important, they will be "targeting 20 culture makers and 12 policy makers to use their power for good." They let the audience in on the secret that whatever billionaires and celebrities talk about spreads instantly. So they are calling on Oprah, Bono, Mark Zuckerberg and Ryan Seacrest to speak out. And they will be targeting senators and congressmen as well, explaining that they pay attention when they get a lot of phone calls on the same subject. They truly believe that the government responds to the will of the people. All the information the viewer might need to be involved will be on the Kony 2012 website. By participating, the viewer is told they will be part of the news, redefining "the propaganda we see all day, every day." Here Shepard Fairey, the street artist famous for his Obama HOPE posters, weighs in with his philosophy of how one person can make a huge difference. Russell tells the audience that like the Fairey posters that made such a splash, a Kony poster will take over the consciousness and "change the conversation of our culture." And it will be a people's movement that will change history, like the many around the world that are turning the system upside down. Giving his supporters the ability of "change history" is a very empowering and effective drumbeat.

The plan, Russell explains, is for the campaign to culminate on the evening of April 20[th,] 2012, with all the active supporters of the movement blanketing the world with posters, so that Kony will be on everyone's lips the next

morning. All anyone needs to do is sign up and buy an Action Kit filled with posters, bracelets, flyers and other info, and they can be a part of this movement, which Russell believes is "shaping human history." The video ends with three requests: that you sign the pledge to show support, that you order your Action Kit, and that you donate money. Any or all of these will mean you have joined "our army for peace." And you MUST share this video.

The story is simple and repeats key themes throughout the film: young people have a lot of power; it is not difficult if we band together; social media is the way of the future; and fame is a tool. The messages are wrapped in a visually compelling package that speaks to each viewer personally. The solution is framed as a citizen action that can force the hand of the government.

The production values are very important since they give the audience a different set of cues about how to experience the film. It is professionally produced giving the audience their first cue about how significant it is. There is powerful music throughout, and spinning globes that tell the audience that this is an international story. Rather than narrate, the voice-over gives the viewers a lot of commands, while underscoring the entire narrative with the inclusive message that we are all connected and have the agency to do important things.

The key points -- about making people a part of history and making it easy to be part of something that changes the world -- were certainly empowering for their young audience. There is a lot to learn from the design and execution of this film from a technical standpoint. Over a hundred million people shared it.

The Power of Citizen Journalism

Journalism has always been a key mediator of the public sphere, and it has changed because of new technologies. Young people are getting their news and information less from newspapers and TV news and more from alternate sources on the Internet. Stories are updated and dissected in real time, so that news on one side of the world may take only minutes to reach the other side of the world. This new online space has a lot of promise, but has yet to fully live up to the democratic imperative it was hoped to present.

A person armed with a cell phone can change the perception of the public. News organizations regularly use non-professional videos of scenes as they happen. This is an important addition to the public sphere. Although there is a gatekeeper deciding which footage mainstream news will air, it has an authenticity generated by its immediacy. When it is clearly the press framing an issue, or when a story has gotten old, it doesn't hold the same panache for the audience.

More people than ever are participating in citizen journalism -- breaking news on Twitter, covering their communities' issues on Facebook, live streaming, distributing news via email, community radio shows and writing blogs on issues of civic and community significance. Some of these people are what we'd consider "traditional" journalists working on new platforms, but many aren't.

For people like the citizen journalists trained by The Tiziano Project, they will almost always produce a different story from what foreign journalists are capable of doing.   They have the benefit of both a cultural understanding, as well

as the trust of the local community. Invisible Children's blog now includes stories from many local Ugandan contributors and reports on stories that the mainstream press does not give air or page time.

Idle No More citizen journalist bloggers covered a protest on Oct 17, 2013. While stories from the mainstream press focused on a flag burning, the bloggers pointed out it was just 3 minutes of a 3-hour protest, and discussed the events with more depth. The blogs were written from a first person, on-the-ground perspective. They are shared and discussed and influence further actions.

While Invisible Children promotes citizen journalism through its blog, Idle No More is creating a platform and a social support system for citizen journalists. The Tiziano Project is training people to tell professional stories that may counter the views of the mainstream. It takes the power from the corporate press and puts it in the hands of the people on the ground. By learning the skills to tell their own stories the people determine the context of news being told about them. It is a subversive way of creating news. Around the world people are "committing acts of journalism" that are serving their communities, influencing national debates, changing the face of journalism, and building a new public sphere.

Moving from Social Media to Mass Media

The Tiziano Project is cognizant of the fact that mainstream media is more likely to air stories that have the right production values and especially journalistic ethics. And they have framed this organization as alternative media, but only in the sense that it is an alternative to corporate news. They partner with

established journalists and media outlets to move local stories to mass audiences. Some sort of media distribution is built into the contract with each local partnership. Their stories are designed to go to the mainstream from places that are usually unreported, but they've found that the stories that community members often want to tell are cultural expressions more than cold hard facts, so the question of whether they will be picked up by news organizations remains. Many of their viewers are people in academic settings, looking at them as cultural documentation. And several of their stories have made it onto mainstream news. Fifteen stories from their Kurdistan students were shown on CNN International, and their student's projects in Latvia were featured at the National History Museum.

Idle No More encourages their members to blog to counter mainstream narratives of the movement, and shares the links of those stories with their online communities on Facebook and Twitter. Idle No More transformed from an online discussion to an important topic in mass media once protests began. Mass media exposure, over the hunger strike, the international human rights day, and over the gatherings and protests helped give the movement credibility and increased its reach.

But just getting people to notice is not enough to effect change. Publicity can also mean extra scrutiny and your story can be changed in the examination. Kony 2012 became a bigger and bigger story as the mass media picked it up. There was a good and a bad side to this. More people heard of it and many more signed on, but others were very vocal in their criticisms. Citizen journalists were

the first to question the Kony video. Because the hashtag #stopkony was trending worldwide, it got the attention of people in Uganda who immediately began writing about what was wrong with the movement, and countering the "truth" of the video. This led to a higher level of accountability and thoughtful engagement of the Invisible Children organization with the communities that they sought to support.

The Tiziano Project's stories are unique and of interest to the mainstream especially when an event happens in a locale that the news usually doesn't or cannot cover. Having trained journalists on the ground with a cultural understanding of the situation is a critical addition to international journalism. The Arab Spring is instructive in this case. Many of the stories that were told only made it out because people were on the ground with their cell phones and understood the importance of what was happening and had the ability to reach out to a world audience. But those stories were evaluated and curated by people in the news services without the cultural understanding that the new citizen journalists from the Tiziano Project would bring to it. The stories that came out would have had the added veneer of journalistic ethics and investigative inquiry, giving them a more credible edge. Tiziano admits that not all their students will become journalists, but armed with the skills they have, they are ready and able when another conflict arises to report in ways that the mainstream and others on the street are not capable.

Chapter Four: Conclusions, Limitations, and Recommendations

Conclusions

The creation of a functional public sphere is an important goal. It can only be achieved when all the stakeholders have voice, access, equal weight and an audience. These organizations have added voices and ideas to the public sphere, each in their own way. They have added to the world's consciousness about aboriginal communities and their culture in Canada, about child soldiers and warlords in Uganda, and about communities who have lived through or are still living in conflict zones. Each of them has also been speaking to and for a specific constituency, though they have a great deal wider reach than they ever would have before the Internet.

For Idle No More, social media have afforded them a meeting place and an easy way to organize on a countrywide scale. Left out of the public sphere for centuries, the Indigenous people of Canada had limited voice and ability to exercise their agency as a group. And though the catalyst for this movement was one particular bill moving though the legislature, they realized that their efforts did not have to be judged or halted by a particular victory or loss. The movement evolved. Because people were banded together around a base of common challenges, and not just one issue or one leader, it was easier to realign with new priorities. They have been politically successful because now they have a loud voice, a very wide reach, and a significant presence in the public sphere.

Finding their place in the public sphere was more difficult for Invisible Children. The Kony 2012 campaign showed that new media is a great vehicle for

disseminating a narrative, and especially the importance of building a strong network before an event push, but it also pointed to the dangers of losing control of the message when it spreads faster than anticipated and beyond the chosen audience. They had tailored the film perfectly for their intended audience, but their fame brought a lot of negativity to the cause when it crossed over to other constituencies. Though they were not prepared for their success or for the backlash, they learned from that mistake, and the end result was a political win for their cause. As a model for advocacy media, they are a great case study.

It is really too early to tell whether The Tiziano Project is having an effect on the public sphere. In the communities in which they have taught, being able to articulate local stories has help the students and the communities to feel heard. But few of them have crossed over to mass media, as is their mission. Training young journalists in conflict zones and promoting an alternative media model though is proving to be important everywhere for a healthier public sphere.

Recommendations for Further Research

The biggest impediment to a functional public sphere is the fragmented nature of modern life, which is exacerbated by the design of the Internet, which makes it too easy for people to remain unchallenged. Research about how we might integrate ideas and promote dialogue needs to be prioritized. It may be that the answer is in designing a better media landscape.

Part of the problem with the Internet as a public sphere in comparison with older forms of media is its limitlessness, which at first glace would seem to make it a more attractive locale. But leaving to an uniformed public the choices of which sites to trust based on nothing more than popularity and recommendation has left consensus building in a quandary.

With older forms of media, pre-corporate media, there were more clearly defined experts and journalistic ethics meaning that information consumers could have an expectation that what they were reading or viewing or hearing was true. Expecting that the most truthful information will rise to the top today is impossible. The equalizing nature of the Internet means that every website and questionable "expert" contributes to the public sphere. Hoping for a democracy of thought leaves us with populism rather than assurance. There may be algorithms that can produce a more trustworthy searching experience and help build a healthier online public sphere. This research must be done now.

Limitations

While all three organizations are using new and old media well to further their aims, none have fully realized the potential of the Internet as a tool for energizing the public sphere. The self-siloing nature of social media and the Internet may be the most daunting challenge to overcome. The Internet has made it much easier for people to cut themselves off from differing opinions. It is precisely this interchange of different ideas that needs to be heard and discussed for our communities to come together creating a functional political sphere and a

robust democracy. While cyberspace may be becoming easier and easier to navigate, the anonymity it affords does not invite the kind of discussion that would lead to reasoned consensus, and it is designed in many instances more for reaction than pro-action. The technology is not inherently bad, but how we use it to interact may need to evolve. More and more sites are switching from anonymous comments to real names, but this doesn't get around the concept of anonymity. Especially because of its reach, even with real names attached to comments they might as well be anonymous; outside of our personal contacts, it is unlikely that people interacting on the web will also have face-to-face contact. Because of this cloak of anonymity people behave differently online than they would in a live community. Even beyond the challenges of civil discourse and anonymity, the cacophony of voices online is not always conducive to reasoned discussion.

Facebook and other social media sites are a lot like the new church. You form your congregation with the people you feel similar to, who follow the same dogma. You share and study and discuss, and become more convinced of your correctness. And if someone displeases you, you excommunicate them. While you may invite others into your group, you are selective, lest they disrupt your flock. The consensus building nature of public discourse that Habermas spoke of in the public sphere that requires an open airing of ideas is not able to function well in this kind of environment.

Possibilities: The place for social media in the public sphere

"Social media spark a revelation that we, the people, have a voice, and through the democratization of content and ideas we can once again unite around common passions, inspire movements, and ignite change."
— Brian Solis

When we speak of marginalized people and communities, we are not just talking about the politically disenfranchised, but also those disenfranchised from other forms of representation, like the media. The mass media gatekeepers have not deemed their stories significant, so they are left by the side of the road, unheard, the issues that matter to their lives unaddressed. Most of what the public "knows" has been filtered through the lens of corporate media. Corporate media does not exist to enlighten, embolden or even encourage an open discussion of issues that the public needs to be involved with for a more equitable world. But with the advent of the Internet and new media, marginalized communities can make more noise about issues that impact them. They can reach an audience that may include some of the gatekeepers, and if the noise is loud enough, they may no longer be able to be ignored.

Even if social change is does not come about quickly, media have the power to change perceptions and attitudes. That is the first step toward social and political change. The Civil Rights Movement did not happen overnight. The media's attention was critical; without it the movement would not have gained support of people far removed from the events. Since then the major changes to the media include the speed with which information flows, and the ability of many

more people to be a part of "the media." These two forces together create whole new possibilities.

Where the Internet and new media seem to be working best are in the collaborations of like-minded people. While grassroots movements like Idle No More and Occupy Wall Street have no central leadership to control the message, the messages have been ideologically consistent.

So how then do we take this technology that is already designed for a free flow of information turn it into a better public sphere? For culture to be sustained, there must be opportunities to exercise agency, communal cohesion, points of pride and common cause. Civic engagement is a crucial element of the public sphere. This exploration began with the question of whether new forms of media can change minds or influence opinions and spur action on critical issues. It also investigated how the media can exist as a voice of the people, separate from and as a counterpoint to the mainstream domination by politically and economically powerful people. The answer to both is yes. The experiences from these three suggest a media model for social change that takes the best of each. This model would include:

- *Being open to new constituencies that embrace your message and expand your reach.*
- *Using high quality video storytelling to build an inclusive community*
- *Promoting media skills that include ethical standards to bring stories to a wider audience*
- *Being prepared for unintended consequences*
- *Crafting a message that starts a discussion*
- *Building tightly-connected online communities that use their power to network, before moving to offline action*
- *Understanding that stories move freely from platform to person to medium affecting each as they travel*

The balance of power between corporate and non-corporate media does seem to be an impediment to an ideal democratic media landscape, and the public sphere it promises appears remote because of the corporate money in today's politics. But one of the bright spots in the future for media is the growth of alternative media and the younger generation's embrace of new media as a news and information portal. Online media consumers' modes of engagement are changing constantly, and open source innovation may successfully challenge corporate media's hegemony creating a more balanced and less consumerist landscape. The Internet could achieve its idealist promise. As Idle No More shows, the Internet is a great tool for organizing and community building. The Tiziano Project demonstrates the great potential for new forms of journalism to enhance stories and change perceptions. And Invisible Children has illustrated the immense power of social media to spread ideas around the globe. And as corporate media tries to hold on to its monopoly as the purveyor of information, they are grappling with the fact that the people know that there are plenty of other sources for news and information. It is in the people's hands.

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